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*INTERLUDES
AND POEMS*



INTERLUDES AND POEMS

BY LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

*LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
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TO
CATHERINE

960709

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THE NEW GOD : A MIRACLE .

THE NEW GOD : A MIRACLE

Persons.

Margaret, a Princess, turned Christian.

A Prince, suitor for Margaret }
The King } Heathen.

Place : In Paynim, on the extreme coasts of the world.

Margaret's Room.

*M*ARGARET (*alone, singing to her harp*).
Too soothe and mild your lowland airs
For one whose hope is gone :
I'm thinking of a little tarn,
Brown, very lone.

Would now the tall swift mists could lay
Their wet grasp on my hair,
And the great natures of the hills
Round me friendly were.

In vain !—For taking hills your plains
 Have spoilt my soul, I think,
 But would my feet were going down
 Towards the brown tarn's brink.

Is this a sin ? Sure no one but my heart
 Can tell the truth of my longing for the tarn.
 Best pray again, perhaps ; I am tired of prayer.

The Prince comes in.

Margaret. You !—
 Why are you in my privacy ?

Prince. Sweet, pardon ;
 Your father gave me leave to you.

Margaret. He has
 Invented a new plague then, you ?

Prince. He knows
 I love you——

Margaret. And he looks to work your
 love

Upon my soul tormenting, as he swears
 To work his wheels and pincers on my flesh ?

Prince. The fierce old man your father spake
 me then,

Not sweet maid Margaret. Why are you grown
 Unkind to love ? I come to take you hence.
 Soon as I heard the King to this sad isle

Had forced you, hastily and alone I followed.
 O, I will never use horse so again !
 And I was wondering, all the time I rode,
 How I could bear to cripple him, my best.
 But there was nothing in mine ears but wings
 Of a buzzing fear, and I was stung in the soul
 Poisonously by a breese, infecting me
 To fever with its fed offal,—noisome talk,
 Rank common news of you,—dear Heaven, of
 you !

Of your new faith, and of your dungeoning here,
 Your father's loathing ; but the worst was, none
 For certain knew whether the shivering death,
 The only thing alive in these rotten fens,
 Had laid his nasty hand on you. But now
 You'll come with me out of this misery.
 Nature lies down a lazar here ; the air
 Is rank with her disease, and the brass sun
 Cannot be virtuous to the sodden land.
 All day there is no little noise of life,
 The green is only wickedness of a fester.
 You are of the hills : will you not see how wrong
 To give such a life as yours to the waste swamp ?

Margaret. What help for me ? Is not this
 my father's house ?

Prince. Yes, and an ill one ! As I took the
 broken causey,—

That seemed a mouldering spine across the marsh,
An old thrawn death, unsepulchred, of a dragon,—
In the half-light the low unshapen heap
Lookt like a sleeping effe in his form
Among the lifeless bogs, hating the world,
Immemorially alone,—the son, I thought,
Of these green bones I tread on; a dull sea moaned
Along the mudflats, as he yearned in dreams
To be less loathly. These earth-builded walls
Keep not the evening fogs out, but they crawl
Through crevices and dim the candle flames,
And hang like aguish dreams about your bed.
O, are you shivering? Am I too late?
Come back with me to the salt sunny sands,
The upland winds, the rains, and valley mists,
And pines.

Margaret. You could have moved me once.

Prince.

Not now?

Did that wild wizard whom your father killed,
Who taught you how to make his love turn hate,
That Christian whose loose lore is so unkind,
Teach you to hate the earth,—larch-woods when
spring

Flings on them sudden green, and the high heaven
Is blue behind?—or plough-fields when the share
Turns the good-smelling soil? or apple-orchards?
Or to hate love?

Margaret. Yes, to hate love and lovers.

But not the earth, I think. And sometimes
longing

Will come upon me for the open air,
For sunbeams which no rotting vapours swarm,
For starry nights ;—grey statues here of fog,
With held-up arms, guesst by the waving sleeve,
Stalk round the house all night, whose monstrous
breathing

Kills those weak-flamed lamps. Often the quags
Call with a doleful voice, or shake as though
Somewhat beneath them stirred.—But you, if all
Who ought to love me hate, why do you love ?

Prince. Have you no mirror ?

Margaret. Alas, is it that ?

Prince. Come with me now ! Into the hills !

Margaret. The hills !

(I thank thee, God !)—No, friend, and no. But
you,

Get you among the upland health of our hills,
That lift above the surface of earth's sound,
Where the stream's trouble seems a kind of quiet,
And news of lowland life break upon the cliffs,
Sheer rampired down to the meads, to nothing
more

Than spray of noise, so thin,—the valley's mowing,
Sheep-washing, a white stir, sound weaker there

Than when a breeze, like a spent bird, his wings
Shuts, and settles upon the whinberries
And ligs there, a caress. And take this with you—
I love you not, and I loathe having loved.

Now go, and quickly. Why does he not go?

Prince. Will you not hear my sorrow first?

Margaret. I know it,—

Love, and love forsworn, and love unquit,
And love again.

Prince. Ay, there is that for me,
But therewithal another and a greater.

Margaret. Greater?

Prince. Lend me your harp. Have you forgot,
Margaret, how pleasantly we spent our love?

Margaret. I pray you not remember it.

Prince. This only.

We had a charm against the common life,
That—as a pedlar weary with the road,
Eyes daft with the long whiteness, all adust,
And with his pack quite overdone, may meet
Golden delight, the fragrance of the gorse,
And cheat his thirst,—made glamour be about us,
Tales of the Gods on earth. And gladly you
Then listened, when I, telling of the Gods,
With speaking mixt with harp-playing contrived
Pleasure for you.

Margaret. It was a sin in me.

Prince. But hear a last tale of the Gods we loved.

'Twill falter and be wayward ; for my thought
Is set amid new matters where I go
Starless and fooled ; as if on a mountain side
Mist took away the light, and the ground began
To live beneath my feet and writhe, and boulders
Knew how to move, and with a soundless gait
Walkt hulking through the gloom. So shall I be
In this tale of the ending of the Gods :
Yet hear me through. It is of you besides.

*[He takes the harp, and speaks upon his
playing of it, looking to Margaret.]*

I saw you first in the wet primrose-month ;
With thin white dress and yellow clinging hair
You seemed to move through the warm drenching
rain

A cloud slid out of the dawn to roam the hills,
Forgetting to melt its fleece to shower-drops,
Still wearing sun it caught an hour ago.
Gods ! that was a maid ye might have loved
When you were young-limb'd ;—then, for now no
more,

I think, for you is pour'd deathless liquor
When, crowned with festival, the brotherhood
Of Gods carouses, and Fate bears the wine
Till in each beaker brimming with red darkness

Coils and shakes a spirit of golden light,
 Immortal youth, caught from an early sun.
 (Down on to earth the fragrance of the spilth
 Stoopt, and as fire takes hold upon the silver,
 Youth of the Gods did take that early world,
 And the air tasted of Heaven's holiday.)

But the slave Fate who serves Gods, hating them,
 Visited the lean Hours in that cave
 Where the Gods kept them mewed, brewing of
 Time,
 And found them huddled to their witch-work,
 bought

Their service, promising they should pour out all
 The mischief in their urns of bitter years
 Upon the innocent world. From them he fetched
 Skill'd poison, phial'd cunning, wise disaster,
 Stronger than kind of Gods, and with this stew
 Hemlock'd the wine of Heaven, gave them drink
 Age unawares, managing all their nerves,
 Unfitting for rule. Out of their blue halls,
 Out of the morning and the roofless air,
 Out of their ample kingship, they must slink
 Into a burial dark and shameful, far
 From the sun's mastery, and the stare of day,
 Thickets of stars, and windy plains of sky,
 Where slope space reaches the lower lifelessness ;
 Deep overwhelmed in some deaf pond of dull

Inactive element, that stagnates close
 Against the old and still uncleaned disorder,
 Where the thick cold and slime of ungenerate dark
 Glues up immortal sense and ken divine ;
 Often their drownèd agony shall heave
 Large sobs from under, till the shoulder'd pit
 Plunges, the blind cumber of the useless mire ;
 Unpitied doom ; there shall no sight win through
 The blear confusion of that clime to find
 Their deathless dying, nor trust in them, men's
 prayers,

Come to their low disease,—without a heed
 In that forgetful delf swallow'd. Only,
 When with a golden footing on the seas
 Summer goes forth, and tranced waves follow her,
 Talking their wide blue meanings at her heels
 Murmurous, or lift white kisses to her ankles,
 Now for the morning fisher-fleet that rows
 To take the freak-backt mackerel, an acre
 Threshing with plenty, silver'd with playing sides,
 It shall not be for ease amid the toil
 Of oars and seine to join in the old catch
 Lifting their thoughts to the unlabour'd ones :
 “ Sing, brothers, sing : for in the middle bay
 The gannet stoop upon the silly crew ;
 Behind the shoal the leaping porpoise prey,
 And we shall hawl a many fish to-day ;

But this large weather the Gods share with you :
Be happy, for the good Gods are happy too."

Not June, but the black nether winter is
Henceforward the Gods' long season. Spring,
The same young mad amazement, shall begin ;
But there will be a want in Aprils now,
And when the neighbours greet, it is not thus :
"Are not the Gods down here to-day ? You know
There is no greenness up in Heaven, they say.
But it is best, these days, even if one
Have the dawn for a place, and the winds for roads,
To be afoot on grass. And I dare swear
The cuckoo-flower down in my water-meadow
Has made a test of whiteness for the side
(In Heaven unquestion'd) of a goddess young.
And see the light upon the cowslip-brede ?
One of our worships hath his deity
Put off there, for that beauty seemed enough
Endowment for one being ; what makes a god
They have, the flowers ; he'll take it back ere noon ;
Meantime, 'tis in my field. Ay, all the herb
Is fresh from the treading of some holiness."
But no such visitings now ; and we shall know
Dimly 'tis ill with the Gods. Yea, though the
hutch

And stifle of their piteous school lies where
Our day shows but a little cloudy wheel,

Their grief shall come between the sun and earth,
 A hint of shame dissolved in the golden light.
 And soon our prayers, into the yards of Heaven
 And awning-coolth that flatters o'er them coming
 With reverences ready, are taken there
 In desolateness, come whimpering back to us,
 Unentertained ; for no blithe speech of the Gods
 Heard they along the passages of Heaven.
 And if some, bold with the much need they carry,
 Search and cry for the Gods, they'll find them fought
 With sickness, held down as if knelt upon,
 Over their beauty hateful pain written
 Slandering,—ay, that beauty which aloft
 Crowned the world's beauty striving up like fire
 Away from coals and dross, till in the Gods
 To pure flame won, golden, not mixt with time,
 That beauty killed and turned to dingy tarnish.
 Whose were the arms that late managed the sun,
 The hands that could have jarred the starry gear ?
 The Gods' ? but soon they'll have too weak a scope
 To daunt the plagues sordid like flies about them.
 Destiny is an older thing than Gods :
 When that blind power abhors them, they are
 naught.

So now ; and from her house in the night she has
 Let loose the living storms there denn'd, uncaged
 The wings of blights, unstabled pests of demons,

Enlarged new spawn from out the breeding deep,
All to harm the good Gods. See you not now,
Watcher on Heaven's tower, dun afar off
Strange horrible weather smoking into the light,
The muster of her swarms? 'Tis she has sent
A siege to Heaven, vexed already and scared,
Flights of insolence, pester of wild ghosts,
Tongue-still'd over the walls with moony stare
To gnarl upon the session of blenched Gods,
Ring their fear with a hedge of gleeful faces,
Mocking silently. This is for Heaven; but earth
Has too their practice, as that some in flesh
Must sheathe the broad destruction of their vans,
Fold up the hovering of fledged iron noise,
Case their claw'd hatred smoothly, lodge in souls
Human their purposes. And one, the worst
Whelpt in the cellars of destiny's lone house,
Chose this slim beauty, wherein our quick Truth
More native than in sunlight seemed, this girl
As shed for his rough horror. Who dare think
Her voice now does to cover a fiend's bleating?—
That body which I love so well is now
An inn of villainy for Gods and men?

Ah, Gods! Last year perhaps a certain scorn
Took you, when leaning o'er men's business
Down from your builded privacy. How blame
The poor deluded Gods, so wholly at ease?

But now there is a labour and a sweat,
 Panting, despair, ready for you,—a hunt
 Now straining at you, soon to be unlasht,
 Gaped throats, fangs unlipt, many-footed fear.
 Here's one will clap her hands, here's one will
 laugh

At that day's sport, when from the opened gloom—
 The low, slough-moated mews of natures bad—
 Out of their famine leaping come Fate's dogs
 To pull down Gods in the white day ; for still
 Some keen permitted Evil o'ertakes Good.
 The kennelled Evil howls and hungers long,
 But Good at last is thrown among the jaws
 As carrion to be scavenged up by Evil,
 And the wincing air, (so rumour'd of that greed)
 Peals to beast-laughter. Here's one will laugh
 with Evil.

Ah, but my heart, my heart, is it so well ?—
 These hides, mudded from lairs in the bottom-
 world,
 Pitching a tented doom round Heaven town
 Of wicked reek, that throws, so wide it is,
 A tawny malady on the white streets ?—
 These swift clemm'd curses having leave to hound
 Divinity ?—they all enlargement get,
 But cover is the thing for Gods, to whom
 All question is the day, unanswerable.

Which of them ever thought to have a need
Of Death?—the famous frequent roads he hath
made

Downwards, the gates that shut out noise,—a
jest

In Heaven. “Not for us,” they said ; and still
The darkness Death has built around his rest
Is nowhere hinged for them, and the main roads,
So straight and easy trodden of us men,
Slide from the feet of Gods, bewilderment ;
No alley goes to refuge from the mouths ;
Only for them is shelter in the wide
Flat unseen marches of nonentity,
The unmeasured place, where Wisdom never
comes,

And Power sickens, failure, and all unhealth ;
To lodge with half-made things, forgotten stuff
That should be dead but lives unkind, crude
fleshes

Unkneaded into form, or if in form
Infamous, ribaldries of the Power that makes.
They are among the vermin, none so worthless
As these new sins, the Gods ; themselves un-
changed,

But that unsensed outer Mood, beyond
This round of caused things (yet all within
As air is in the flame), changed. The event

Of its Existence flows away from them,
 A tide pouring into new Law, and they
 Are left behind, shipwreckt in the dark,
 Sunder'd from any voice of the living waters,
 Deserted by their holiness, sifted out,
 Drained off like lees, they who once were Heaven,
 Become suddenly bad and the waste of the world,
 Given to the unspeakable murder of old hell.
 And nevermore their hair shall feel the stir
 Of fellowly winds, nor see they blue again.

But Fate, enfranchis'd from the Gods' good rule,
 Now gets to work. Now what the Gods would
 make

Of Man shatters, the subtle singleness,
 The new rare thing their skill, spanning all life,
 Had sometime won from its diverseness, as we
 From many wires a tune ; and though Man stopt,
 In divine memories had linger'd on
 That wonder of humanity, at last
 A just psaltery, toucht into a song.
 Fate with malicious fingers breaks the intent,
 And 'tis enough for him if the poor ado
 (So close to the dirt now) of life's multitude
 Make him a foolish, cruel, useless game.

Destiny made all bad, ugly : the Gods
 Came, and with craft fashion'd her thought to
 good,

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Earth and men's minds ; they go, these Gods,
and all

Slips back to its old rankness, earth and men's
minds.

And does this gladden Margaret?—she whose
eyes,

As open pools, in the grey hour before
Morning, expect the day and wait, assured,
To have their patient ken fill'd up with blue—
Waited for wonder and the fearful joy
When she should meet One at a riding's turn
Long known in worship darkly, while the green
wood,

Sacred of Him like burning, thrilled and glowed
A temple of emerald flame around.—But then,
That curst old man, that Christian !

[*He drops the harp.*

Ah, Margaret,
Although your use is to turn mankind from gods,
I yet must love you. Ay, now I see you here
Pale, slender, hunger-eyed, in this mean room,—
Ah, what hath blent the morning in your eyes ?—
My love is fiercer grown. Come to me, love !
Although you hate my gods, remember love.

Margaret. Remember love ? Ah, but when I
left you

There was something rended in my breast, that still

Aches,—as you know a wound that has catcht cold
Will keep all nerves astretch upon sense, quivering
In subtle shifting harmonies of pain.

So that rude snatch did play upon my heart-strings,
And still they tremble to the same dull tune,
And still the same loud pain is going through me.
But yet I may not hate my grief. They say
God loves a soul all anguish.

Prince.

Does he so ?

Loves he mine then, think you ?—and belike
When he has gotten lordship wide enough
He'll make the world all anguish, and then love it ?
Is it a good thing to be loved by him ?
And when he has finished hunting our poor Gods,
And when his hounds, his pack of merciless Hours,
Have got them down, he'll love them in their pain ?
This is a god to worship, who loves anguish !

Margaret. Why do you stay here ?

Prince.

I must have your love.

I will not take your mild unheartfelt No.
There is an insane thing struggling in me,—
I know it not, but it is stronger than I.

Margaret. There's many more will love you,
for you are

(Forgive me, God !) most beautiful. For me,
I have a lover—but you would not understand.
Enough I cannot love you. Go, beseech you.

Prince. What is this smoke that in the moon-
light swims,
So hampering the air with pleasantness ?
Its silvered fragrance fills the room.

Margaret. My prayers
Just ended. Incense my master gave me,
And bad me use it of an evening so.

Prince. O maidenly cunning ! 'tis some lusty
herb
You burnt. What's this it's doing to my love ?
You knew it maddened like this ?—

Margaret. What ? Leave me.

Prince. Aha, I see. Indeed I lackt in this.
My love was clean ; you'd have it luxury ?
'Twas done, was it not, lest I should be too slow ?
Your coy denials are to prick it on ?
If this is of your master's teaching, sure
He had some knowledge beside of heavenly things.
What, you do mean mere lewdness ?—
Well, I am changed. Come, yield thee, then.

Margaret. Go, Prince,
Before I curse thee for thy beastly words.

Prince. Come, girl, enough. You see I take
your wish.
I'll do it, and then loathe you for 't. Or—go ?
Ay, to the dark old King. This matter is,
I see, for him to know. For as we talkt

I somehow felt there was a thing kept hid
 Behind his mannerly speech. And suddenly
 It tare the curtain of his sorrowful words,
 The unkind inhabitant of his nature, lookt
 Into mine eyes impudent, ay, and gleeful,
 As if it had found a means for its device.
 And, as the hag is like the maid, a face
 Burnt in the joys of fiendish clips, that crime
 Was like what once was love for you. In truth
 The horror I saw sitting in his mind
 Then quite o'er-came my wit to grasp, for I
 Never before had seen a father's hate,
 And knew it not. Now its intent I see,
 This,—you have skilfully cheated him you make
 Much of your chastity : therefore most glad
 Were he if you dishonoured were. But now,
 It seems you are not quite so nice as he
 Reckoned. The shame he would have forced on
 you

You have already wreakt upon yourself.
 And yet perhaps I do him wrong. I am
 Dismayed, my reason thrown, shamefully caught
 In your fine wickedness, wilily noosed and lashed,
 And the wise doors he kept outrage behind
 (The squinting lechery of snouts and manes)
 To starve, and put crazed faces to the grids,
 Set wide ; and gaols of filthy-gesturing thoughts

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Go loud through my brain, speaking tongues of
hell ;

As you would have them, setting me on to do
Beastliness. Wait you here. I fetch the King.
To him look innocent of your hopes.

Margaret (kneels). No !

Fetch not my father here ! Is this your love ?

Prince. Whether 'tis love or hatred now I
know not,

What care you ? Lust is the thing for you.

[*He goes.*]

Margaret. Hear me, O God.

I have been lesson'd all imperfectly
In thy saint knowledge ; for they killed the man,
Horribly killed the weak old man who brought
News of thee here, ere he could kindly lead
My limping wit into thy council-place.
All I have learnt of thee is, I am thine :
(My father hates me for it). Art thou not mine ?
Strangely thou doest all thy purposes,
Little the mention I have heard of thee ;
But is it not mislikely for thy weal
That I have beauty ?
When I was heathen, I thought it good ; but
now
Take it from me, O God ! Send now thy power
here,

Or surely thou and I be sorely used.
In all this place we twain are quite alone,
And many are against us. Well for us
It were, if thou couldst make me laidly now.
Is it not easy for thee to spoil thy work?—
Sluice on my beauty shame, and ugly scalds ;
Or change me altogether, turn this body
Into a strangeness, make me mixture, laughter,—
But pardon this wild talk ; I am unhinged.
Pardon that then fear jump't upon my will
And rode it down, so that I cringed my knees
That once I sware only to thee should crook.
Only in this thing have me in thy heed,
Undo the strictness which the slow-skill'd years
Use in their duty, and all harms they have
Set by for me, now and at once unloose
Banded upon me, confusing this young flesh,
Unsettling from its many keeps my beauty.
Am I not loved enough for this? O then
I'd have thee wroth, so thou bruise out my beauty.
Ay me, I fear—O God, I loved him once—
O swift, swift, my part done, thine yet remains ;
Do some horror upon me, send some worm
Of eager malady to crawl my skin
Tracking, or blow uncleanness on it, of sores
Or vile obliterating rash, furfair
Stiff in a stark mask. Hear me, O God !

God speaks.

I hear thee.

Margaret.

Is it God

Speaks words strangely into me, larger than
aught

My knowledge took before, and without sound?

God.

I have been listening all this while, my friend.

Margaret. Give me some other shape, that to
this prince

I be not lewdness nor a drunkenness

Making him brutishly insult on thee.

I would no longer be thus dangerous,

Thus beautiful.

God.

Simple this prayer is, smelling sweet to me,

Therefore I take it and begin my power.

Yea, I will largely let thee out of here,

Of being beautiful, otherwise tiring thee.

Thou shalt appear as God, and the glory of God.

These two, when they shall look upon thy form,

Shall be alone when I unmake the world.

The appearance of the earth shall fail to them,

And the great sides of the world flinch and crack
open,

Spilling my glory out of its splitten hidings :
 I now put off the nature of the world.
 For long enough have I been matter, speed
 And business of forces, place and time,
 The roomy play of motes through the wide stress
 Of fine tense ether, building minds and worlds.
 But suddenly the whole kind of things appears
 Like scale upon the molten Real, soon
 Riving apieces, running, all unfixt,
 Out of dimension into God. And this
 Eternity, scattered with starry troubles,
 Becomes a firth of glory, till again
 I am a deed, a strength-wielding stuff,
 And out of the tide lifteth another shore.
 So shalt thou look ; for I will lend thee all
 My latter anger. Then the orderly stars
 Shall be a tumult of small crass, a scurf
 Worn for an instant by the fire divine ;
 And all the many powers of the world
 A spray like smoke driven before my face.
 God, when all the multitudinous flow
 Of Being sets backward to him ; God, when He
 Is only Glory, is before these two ;
 And nowhere is there aught but God and these.
 They are not safe. When no identity
 Can be outside my state ; when mind, nor sun,
 Nor commonalty of suns, nor oldest fate,

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But disarrangeth, mixing into Me ;
 Loose as a flame all fastened surety ;
 They are not separate : their confined selfs
 Shall burst their bands and squander into naught ;
 For all untimely here these two shall come
 Alone into the doom, the present God.

The Prince (without). Now, thou innocent
 foxery, weeping, art thou ?
 Take heart, I am not gone ;
 But since thy wish is so, (for the sorrowing king
 Tells me the naughty warlock taught thee lusts)
 For thee I will be foul, and do a thing
 Detestable to me yesterday.—Besides,
 It is not Margaret, only a fiend
 That wears her flesh.

[*He comes in.*

 This is strange here ;
 Can *I* exist as well as Holiness ?
 I ?—I have forgotten what was "*I*."
 There is no more a thing that saith, *I* am ;
 There is nought to take my senses working.—
 Death,
 I hope ; I am abominable here.

[*A pause.*

The King (without). It should be done by now.
 I gave him drink
 Metheglin spiced with hot infamous drugs.

I mingled in her foolish incense too
 Powders that wake wild lust : the air is well
 Infected,—yet he left her safe untoucht
 The first time : now I think she is tamed indeed.—
 Laughable was it how the wicked steam
 Workt in his blood—

[*He comes in.*

A spell ! O that a craft,
 Made of loose evils outside Nature, should
 More excellent than Nature be.
 The curst thing uses me as sun a vapour ;—
 Curse thee, and this almighty Hell leagued with
 thee.

NOTE.—So far as I know, Martin Schongauer's woodcut is the earliest presentation of this medieval legend—a girl turned by God into His own likeness. But in the central feature of the story I have differed from that noble piece of work, an alteration necessitated not only by preference, but by the nature of this Art. Apart, moreover, from the question of medium, Schongauer's version (which may be his own reading) somewhat smacks of dogma.

BLIND

BLIND *

Two tramps : a Woman and her blind Son, a simply.

MOTHER. No further, child, to-night ; your
mother's tired,
And your blind feet have stumbled more than
once.

Here's firing, a rare lot of withered gorse.

Son. Good : I think fire never puts such cheer
Into his flames as when he's gorse to burn.

Mother. My soul, this is a sad way we are
going ;
I should be underground by rights, I think ;
The woman's dead in me these many years,
And it's a cold thing to carry in your heart.
I'd as lieve my flesh were trapt under this stone
As start again to-morrow the old gate ;
But it would need to be a heavier one
To keep me still and smothered down, if death

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Got me before I'd found my man. Ah well,
 One more day nearer.—If my hate would learn
 Patience ! O, be satisfied, my disease,
 You shall have better food than this old heart ;
 And drink not all my life, you lime-hot hate ;
 There's a trough prepared somewhere against
 your thirst,

Brimming, and then lap your fill.—Here, my son,
 Let me make sure again of your arms' strength :
 Ay, these are proper cords ; and there'll be need
 To take him firmly when we find him, child.

Active he is and tall and beautiful

And a wild anger in him.—See here, boy,

My throat's his throat ; take it as you will his,

No, tighter, tighter, where's your strength ?

Ah——

Son. O mother, did I hurt you ?

Mother.

Simple lad,

You weren't half cruel enough ; you barely
 brought

The red flames into my eyes this time at all.

O but it's good, the grip you have, and good

To feel it on me, try the pains of those

Who strangle ; they will be *his* some day.

Son. Mother, don't let us have more of this
 game.

There's something gets into my fingers, dear,

When I begin to press and feel you breathe
Difficultly : why will you make me hurt you ?

Mother. Practice for you, and practice for my
hate

To trust your grip. You know not what a peril
Your hands must deal with ; doubts keep stinging
me

Whether you have the sinews to make quiet
That danger of a man.—And he escapes us !
We go too halt. Yet there's scant doubt he knows
We're after him ; sure he is afraid
And sleeps not well of nights. Married too
Belike these twenty years,—curse her, the witch.
Son, am I mad ? I wonder if I'm mad.

Son. They say so, mother. Now I've lit the fire,
What are we going to eat ?

Mother. Yes, we must eat,
You to keep strength and I to keep my wits.
Something might hap to-morrow. I'll go beg
At doors, and if I fail (it's darkening) steal.

Son. Ho, fire's in a friendly mood to-night.
That gypsy woman said there was a league,
Didn't she, mother, between me and fire ?
Hark at him purring when I stroke his ribs ;
Does he not play to bite my hand ? She said
His flames, if I sat and waved my hands for him,
Would follow and lick after them, and if

I raised them as to hit him, they would flinch.
Is it true, mother?—but I'm sure it's true.
Mother, have we blind souls?

Mother. What is it to you

If you have soul or no? All you are for
Is, when the time comes, and I tell you grip him,
To get the life in his throat under your hands,
And use your thumbs.

Son. But is not soul a kind
Of hungriness? Because if so, I have some.

Mother. What good's that to you? O the
child you are.

I had a soul once; it was a poor thing
To this fierce master that now drives my flesh.
Who's fed you all these years?

Son. You, mother.

Mother. Then

Love me for it, and burn up all your thought
To zeal like mine for this one deed of ours.
I fear you'll fail me.

Son. Mother, that's not kind.

I know that some one must be killed by me,
And all my lifetime we've been looking for him.
When the time comes, here are my hands. It
seems

A simple thing; and in my head there's room
For much beside.

Mother. Who knows how lucky it is
That in your body grown to such a manhood
Your mind is still a child ?—my poor blind child !

Son. Are you rested, mother ? But it does
not sound

Quite dark yet, so it's no good, I suppose,
You going to the farmyards. Are you sure,
Mother, you'll know him ?

Mother. I will know him, son,
Never you fret. There's not his like in the world.
You mustn't let him speak though, for I fear
The sleeping habit of my tears.

Son. Let me alone for that. Give me his throat,
And slim the words must be to sliver past
The collar I'll have round it.

Mother (to herself). Ah no, God, not like this.
It must have been
Wicked to you, that long-dead love of mine,
That it bore so unkindly. Will you not now
Relent at last, and give my boy to hate ?
It will be vile, if your delivering up
His father to these hands, so rare a man,
Be not thus changed from impiousness, nor made
Holy with a fierce righteousness of hate,
Him to divide from usage of his breath.
I know you have warned death from him, that his
son,

The minting of his passion on the world,
 A love he has forgotten, may be found
 The mischief of his life, his own wild youth
 Standing up formed against him, given hands
 To pluck him out of going on in the light,
 A wrong he did grown big to do him wrong.
 Will you come so near justice, and yet miss?—
 Can you not hate him, child? It must be you
 Who do it, not merely I through you.—
 Vain, this : there is no end to your father's guilt.
 He it was maimed your sense and reason, to spoil
 The rightness of this work. How is it right
 That you should kill him when you hate him not?
 Yet as it falls, so must it ; for I think
 My purpose will not now leave go my life ;
 I have it for a nature, and my law.
 When you were born, it took me, and your growth
 Delighted it, not me. There never was
 Joy in a mother's heart at your great strength ;
 Those were no mother's thanks I gave to Heaven
 That you were thewed so well, but a great praise
 Because I knew God signed my vengeance with
 you.

Yet there is mother in me.—Ah, child, child,
 How near my bitter suckling of you seems.
 Often I lookt that you would cry to draw
 The throbbing fire shut in my breasts ; and yet

Always you took it as it had been milk.
But none the less I knew, sorrow and guilt
Were all I had to feed my innocent with.
The cruelest thing was, how you smiled at me
And never wept that I should give you drink
Unnatural lawless nourishment, despair.
Was it not harsh as brine to taste?—but you
Delighted in it and thrived, my poor blind babe.
You do not hear. What are you rapt upon?

Son. What, mother? O that little girl we met
At midday I was thinking of. You know
She let me put my hands upon her head :
What a wonderful loveliness that is of hair,—
Soft, smooth, delicious as the smell of gorse
In sunlight, and for slipping through your fingers
Better than water. Hair—yes, it would be
A nature, I suppose, between sunshine
And water, and yet neither.—There must be
Words equal to the loveliness of hair ;
If I could find them ! Golden, do they say ?
I wish the words for beauty had been made
By men who knew with hands, and not with eyes.
Why isn't your hair like that little girl's,
Mother ? You mind when first my feeling knew
The moon was shining on me ? Well, I took
That hair into my heart as wonderingly.
But it feels strange there : it's as if it missed

A welcome that it should have found therein.
That's why I askt, have we blind folks a soul ?

Mother. O Lord, Lord, this is not surely he
who must

Thy vengeance do and mine ?

Son.

The ugly beast,

What are her hands to mine ? What right had
she

To take the little one's hair out of my hands ?

Beggar, says she, be off ; how dare you lay

Your dirty mawlers on my darling's head ?—

If hair was made for any hands, for mine.

The beast, I hate her.

Mother.

Ay, can you hate her

Who took away your play, poor simpleton ?

The work we have to do, that would be rare

For demons, will not move you half so much.

That frightens me. And it was your father did it !

Son. Mother, how close these trees are over-
head ;

Yet by their speech they are grown. Are they
askew ?

Mother. Ay, poor old trees, right thrawn they
are. They know

The north-west winds demand a posture of them

And fear the weight of wild feet on their necks

Spraining them, if they stood upright again.

They are grown used to stooping now, as I,
Pulled mainly awry by long-served fierce desire,
Have all my nature strained from rightness, fixt
Crooked and nailed there, bending under my lust.
I am old wood : there is no spring in me.

When this our murder no more burthenously
Rides on my shoulders, but, as I've bred it to,
Springs from its tired seat at him I loved
And fleshes there its greed, what will be then ?
There is no blessed straightening for me.

What is there for me ?

You life of mine, surely you will not stay
In this stale house, when your dear hate is gone
To sleep beside his doing, filled and content ?

You'll lack the comfort of his company ;
And the dim corners of the house will stir,
Rustling with unseen hauntings, that well know
You are in dark, now that his eyes are gone.

The best thing you can do then is, unlatch,
Go out of doors and wander, till you find
In some large quiet place the sleep you want.

Son, mind the fire. I'll go get some food.

[She leaves him.]

Son. She's talkative to-night. I wonder what
This thing is that is in her ? Some day, sure,
She'll have a harm from it, it shakes her so.
I wish we'd come across that bad man soon

48 INTERLUDES AND POEMS

And get it over ; she worsens every month.
Will she turn bitter against me, do you think,
If we're much longer meeting him ? She'll craze,
I fear ; and O it's cold within me,
Thinking the time may come she will not love me.
Why, it seems only a few days gone by
Since she would mother me, without cause be kind ;
No wearying of my talk then ! But I think
All that was years ago. And what a way
Of walking now she's taken to,—no songs,
No lagging, scarce a word ; just padding on
As if we were escaping, or afraid.
All these are like the leaves, that change their voice
When a storm's near an hour before it comes.
And if she turned against me—— ? O but I need,
Mother, your love. We can't be looking, looking,
All day and every day and still not find him ;
And when we do, I'll make my part all right.
Why, I'm forgetting fire. What, are you mum ?
Here ; you can talk of gorse-rubbish, I know.—
I like this hour best of all the day :
The evening cool upon my skin, the dark
And stillness, like a wing's shelter bending down.
I've often thought, if I were tall enough
And reacht my hand up, I should touch the soft
Spread feathers of the resting flight of him
Who covers us with night, so near he seems

Stooping and holding shadow over us,
Roofing the air with wings. It's plain to feel
Some large thing's near, and being good to us.
But you it is, fire, who mainly make
This time my best. I love to be alone
Except for you, and have a talk with you.
What are you? There, I'm always asking that,
And never get but laughing flames for answer.
But I believe I've found you out at last.
You, fire, are the joy of things; there's naught
Would stay in its own self, if it could find
How to be fire and joy. For you're the escape
From strictness and from nature laid on stuff
That once was freedom, still remembering it
Under its show of tameness; and there is
Nothing that is not waiting for a chance
Out of duty to slip, and give way madly
To the old desire it has in it of joy,
Standing up in a flame and telling aloud
That it is fire and no more a shape.
The wonder is, when here some leaves and furze
Have found the way to burn, the whole wide land
Leap not up in a wild glee of fire,
For all the earth's a-tiptoe to join in.
Often I have to run and skip in a wind;
And then I seem to fill the space of the world,
So large in gladness. It's the same thing as lets

Poor straw exult into a shouting blaze.
 Hullo, here's a man.

A Tramp comes in, with a fiddle.

Tramp. Kind sirs, here's virtue for you. Ha,
 that's gorse

You're burning, ay, and ash. Sirs, I have here
 The ware that is of most worth in the world,
 A chance to be good ; the wind was peddling it
 And would not take less than my pride for it,
 But 'tis to you free gift ;—No, I'll not take
 A penny for it : Yours, sir, yours, and welcome.
 So let there be some cheer and fire to-night
 For an old crazy blind bad vagabond.

Here's pity come for you to entertain.

Ah, thank you for those kind words, good brother
 fire ;

Your fellow seems a cautious man,—yet I'm
 A rung in the ladder up to Heaven.—Look here,
 Tongues lie, 'tis true. But see my witnesses
 That never yet spake leasing. Stand you forth,
 Sirs my trowsers, and testify, true souls,
 You are the breeks of Need, the very wear
 Of Pity and Ruth,—no, that's wrong, Ruth's a
 lady.

Honour my trowsers, mister. Why, old fire

Knew them at once, and gave them, honouring,
warmth.

If any one might be proud it's fire ; for he
Has heard God speaking, and is sib to Hell.
A good-hearted fellow, fire, but blind ; and some
Think blindness a poor lot, as it were, affliction ;
It has crost my mind too. Well now, kind sirs,
Do you believe my trowsers ? That my name
Is pity ? (for no poor, no pity, you know.)
Why, this is strange : I took you to be men,
But by your speaking I perceive you all
Are whales and cameleopards. Pray forgive me,
Excellent necks, I reverence your neckships.

Son. Who are you ?

Tramp. Save us, one has got
man's speech.

You had done better, Spots, to have left alone
This English ; 'twill not help your browsings. But
Who am I ?—Saint Francis bad me to his
wedding,

Being the bride's godfather. There, the Wind
His brother and the Rain his sister took
Such a strong liking to me, I'll be hanged
If they will leave me. O a virtuous pair
No doubt ; but she keeps crying down my neck
And he's forever singing psalms, that now
They almost bore me, and—don't tell them, pray,—

I wish they were not quite such faithful friends.
 But, who am I ? Crazy I am and blind,
 Who once had wits and seeing. But now words,
 Words are all my comfort, words and brandy.
 Thank God for words, the best things he has
 made.

Son. Blind am I, but better off than you :
 I never saw.

Tramp. What, blind ?
 Your hand ; ay, sure, that's a blind man's hand.

Son. First, old man, answer me.

[*He pins him by the arms.*]

Tramp. Well, well,
 There's no call for gripping me like that.

Son. What colour are your eyes ?

Tramp. Blind, blind,
 Blind as the weather.

Son. Was it you loved a girl——

Tramp. No, no, it's false. You've given ear
 to slander.

Son. I am glad. Not yet, not yet. Ah, I
 forgot,

He's a tall seeing thewed man, not like this.

Tramp. And I'm glad you've unclaw'd me,
 What a clutch !

Now, will I give you a tune ?

Son.

No.

Tramp. Thank the Lord ;

I needn't scratch my cursed fiddle to-night
For supper. I suppose you've got some supper ?
Lie there, my art,
And a gouty devil quash you with his hoof,
Although it's heart-strings I have stretched upon
you

To squeak out bawdry, which will get me brandy,
And brandy makes the old words move again
Like a bronze-harnesst soldiery that goes
Sounding and sunlit, treading marble roads.

Son. Can you skill words ?

Tramp. Not I, but by the Lord

Words can skill me. They're a better drunken-
ness,

And put your sorrowing toes and unhappy heels
And reproachful hams farther outside the doors
Of sense, shut deaf to their clamouring of pains,
Than any quart of brandy.

Son. What are words ?

Tramp. God's love ! Here's a man after my
own heart ;

We must be brothers, lad. What, you're not one
Who thinks the soul a kind of chemistry,
And words a slag it hides its working in ?
What are words ? Come, I've the speech to-
night ; we'll talk.

In with you to my porch, and I will teach you
 Serious things. Sit in my mystery,
 And be wise. So first, learn we the world ;
 Then, climbing to more excellent knowledge, learn
 How words are things out-marvelling the world.—

The world's a flame of the unquenching fire,
 An upward-rapturing unhindered flame,
 Singing a golden praise that it can be,
 One of the joys of God the eternal fire.
 But than this soaring nature, this green flame,
 Largely exulting, not knowing how to cringe,
 God's joy, there are things even sacreder,
 Words : they are messengers from out God's heart,
 Intimate with him ; through his deed they go,
 This passion of him called the world, approving
 All of fierce gladness in it, bidding leap
 To a yet higher rapture ere it sink.
 They have our souls for their glib travelling,
 Our souls, part of the grain of the burning world.
 And full of the very ardour out of God
 Come words, lit with white fires, having past
 through
 The fearful hearth in Heaven where, unmixed,
 Unfed, the First Beauty terribly burns.
 A great flame is the world, splendid and brave ;
 But words come carrying such a vehemence
 Of Godhead, glowing so hot out of the holy kiln,

The place of fire whence the blaze of existence
rose,
That dulled in brightness looks the world against
them,
Even the radiant thought of man. There be
Who hold words made of thought. But as stars
slide
Through air, so words, bright aliens, slide through
thought,
Leaving a kindled way.

Son.

Ah, this is dark.

I am not kind for them to travel through,
These glories, words. Is there smoke to the
world,
As other flames have smoke? I'm that, belike.
But O the emptiness sometimes within me,
And I paining and striving after words
To ease my sorrowful dumb heart.—But you,
They'll come and go through you? Are they so
fine?

Tramp. Talk they of angels? Never was
there saint

Heard mercy so soft spoken, felt such wise
Pitying forgiveness in his closed communion,
As I've had fear and loathing in my heart
Soothed into calm by mild blue-wearing words.
Terrors? destructions? But for crimson wings,

Garmented wrath, steel hammered and held for
war,

And faces set against ruth—no rioting town
Prophet beheld shadowed by scathe of sword
Or rained upon by coals, elate thereat,
Had such a siege of seraphs awning it
As I've had camped around me, without cause,
Beauty and terror liveried in words.

And I have known when that famed holiness,
That word seeming arrayed in cloth-of-silver,
Love, has suddenly turned so evil a thing,
Devils were fools in wickedness to it ;
And holding my soul numb in its cold look
Has fascinated me to its own evil.

O boy, I've lived : my misery and blindness,
Ay, and the death that's private in me now,
Were things for you to worship, could you but
know

What service 'twas I got them in, a war
As old as Hell, still fighting.

Where's this supper that you talkt about ?
I'm thirsty with this rattling.

Son.

To-day, now,

We met a little girl. My straying hands
Found out her head ;—there went a thrill in me,
I'd opened a new way of being pleased,
Her hair. How I delighted all my feeling

With touch of that strange fineness on my skin !
But after, memory of that delight
Wanted to put on words. And I had none
For it to live in, and it ached in me.
Have you got words to cure the heart, when
 longing,
After there has been pleasure too much felt,
Is like a twisted stitch about it ?

Tramp. Come, you're the speechless world.

 Singers you have

Given you to interpret your own souls
To you, and put in tongueless mouths a song.
Here's one. Now, World, thou shalt be satisfied.
Hot from my heart, made yesterday, is this ;
A friend of mine was hanged, and I got drunk,
Whence this. Open your ears. Are you ready ?

[Twanging his fiddle-strings.]

Heaven, lay your harps aside, and let Hell speak
 a bit.

Ay, we all know you were good, and are good,
 safe in Heaven ;

We hear you giving thanks therefor, but don't
 you think time is

That you thank us for being bad, and trying out
 your holiness ?

What's good without temptation, and who could
 tempt but we, the bad ?

How did you come there, O you good ones, if
not by resisting evil ?

Look at our pains barred over with gratings, and
the throngs of your saviours,

Look, and be ashamed of your bliss : for your
good we are here.

We netted your godly paths, and made torments
for you ;

We whipt you and rebuked you, for the Lord
desired to see you

Practising faith and meekness, and deserving your
reward.

And it is our doing, that you are free of Heaven.
Cunningly were we fashion'd, and put to a cunning use,

Made to delight in pestering you, and blindly
pleasuring

To hound all those who could be good, not wise
enough to know

We blest you with our cruelties, maimed so that
we could not tell

You had our ignorant backs for stairs, leading
you up into Heaven.

We thought that wickedness was best, not masters
of our thought ;

God had robbed us privately of the power and
will to be good.

We had given us wolves' hearts, and the ruth of
shrikes was in us,
Rats infecting cities with plague, and the swine
that ate child's flesh.
And all that you unworthily might spend your
pity and love.
We were the hates forgiven of you, the lecheries
you withstood,
We did you the injuries and scorns you blest us
for.
Bound we were in prison, and you came and
loved us there,
Although you knew our hidden minds bitterly at
work
To pay you back with harm, when we got out again.
We lay down with Evil, and fellowed him at
meals,
And when we came for alms to you, told you
that we loved
All good things, and you believed us, knowing
that we lied.
You could not rest from good, for we were goads
pricking you on ;
The blossom of your holiness needed our crimes
for dung.
Like winds we howled about you, but all our
loudness served

Only to blow your smouldering charity into a
golden flame.

Are not we the nobler, the more honourable we ?
You had an hour's pain on earth, with certain
Heaven at end ;

We have pains in Hell for ever, to get you into
Heaven.

Harp, ay keep on harping ; we know for why you
harp,

So that we shall not be heard, the sacrificed for
good.—

How's that, my lad ? Hurrah for Hell !

Son. But why ?

Tramp. You simply, Hell did that.

Son. It did not take me.

Tramp. O world, that's just your way. You
sit a stock

When new songs are thrown at you, mumbling
still

Old idiocy, and living in your past.

But when I'm dead and rotten, 'twill be then

“Yon was a poet if you like, a jockey !”

Whereas the truth is I am out of date.

Poor world, yours is the loss. O I've been paid,
We who blink not for the swung sword of
Heaven,

We with the calling danger in our blood,

Gladdest of fighters under the sun, must be
Our own paymasters ;—I've fought, and been
worsted,

Matter for pride ! For I am one whose ears
Seldom have not the din of the warring drums
That troop the brave lusts and the crafty sins.
The listed under the flags of our revolt
Look not for wages : they affront defeat
Who go against the seated force of the world
That names itself eternal good and justice,
And gets belief, since it knows how to punish.
We have no knees for it ; and let them shoot
From their advantage on the walls of Heaven,
The service of the Lord, their malice aimed,
Their slingèd war of sickness for our flesh
And madness for our minds, we'll stand upright
And be ourselves, not good. Do you know me,
boy ?

Am I hunger and rags to you ? Fool, I have been
One of the mutiny that attempts God
And to take landing on the side of Heaven,
For foothold on the slippery peril of wall
Reaching and tearing at God's sheer resentment,
Still to be thrown down by the towering glass
A litter of upturned faces, gesturing
Against the calm front of his Sabbath's wall,
The desperate height of shining builded scorn.

This I have been ; there is not in the land
 A surgeon but, examining me, would
 Tell you I speak the truth. However, here
 And now, I'm chiefly hunger. Who was he
 Who first invented supper ? I perceive
 The greatness of that man.

[*The mother has come back.*]

Son. Is that you, mother ?

Mother. We sleep hungry to-night.

—Who's this ?

Tramp (bowing). I greet you, woman of the
 house ;

I also greet the supper, though I smell none.

Mother (low). Michael, Michael ?

Tramp. Where's that ?—Lad, did you hear
 A girl's voice speaking ?—O my wits.

Mother. Michael !

I never thought of you as growing old.

Tramp. The stuff they sell for brandy now-
 a-days !

Poisoned I am. Here's a kind lady asking me
 What will I take for supper, and my hearing
 Is made so foolish, it's as if some dream
 Spoke,—one of my songs, one of my loves,
 Who knows ? Some memory it is.

Mother. Michael infirm ! Michael broken and
 crippled !—

O not to meet you thus I've tired and prayed.
The years would not have gone more cruelly
Over you if they had been flames. Your brow
Is written on in sorrow. Do you mind
A lap you laid your head in once, a hand
That could unmark the trouble from your brow ?

Tramp. There have been many, woman or
dream or ghost

Or madness—that, I think. I knew you'd come.

Mother. I have you again. I heed not anything
But that. I cannot tell how it had been
Were you still happy and great spirited. Now,
So poor, so hurt, so wronged with age,—and I,
Too long lacking you, have had injury.
Time is for both of us we found each other.
Will you not know me, Michael ?

Tramp.

Yes, your voice

I know.

Mother. Unkind ! Am I so gone from you ?

Tramp. If this is madness, it's a gentle one.
Come you to punish me ? Are you my sins
That speak so ruthless ? I repent me not,
Nor if you shift your softness into gibing,
And stop my sleep with moans. If there was
harm

Done through me, let the Lord repent, not me.
I will not lighten Him of any guilt.

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Mother. Poor sick distracted brain,—O how
you need

Me and my love, thank God ! All that I have
To give you, and take nothing,—only thus
Can I relieve the pent and suddenly-thawed
Plenty of love, loosed from a stiffened winter
To pour and well like an inward bleeding wound
Oppressing over my heart. Give me this ease
Of caring for you, finding out your comfort ;
I want no other kindness from you.

Tramp. Woman,
Who are you ?

Mother. Michael, you do not know me ?

Tramp. O cannot you see I'm blind ?

Mother. Alas ! and yet
I should be glad : you need me more than ever.
But—blind ! You for whose eyes the earth put on
Such wonder ! You visited ! O it is wrong,
wrong !

Son. Is it now, mother ? Is this the man ?

Mother. What say you ?
Michael, he is our son. You did not know
It was a son ? He's well framed ? Ah, I forgot.—
Boy, come and kiss your father.

Son. Cunning, cunning,
O my mother's cunning.

Tramp. We travel too fast

For me ; it seems, I've run into a wife :
Let me breathe there awhile. Lo, I, the rebel,
The wanderer, the lawless, settled down
A husband, all in five minutes ! It's a great
change, lady ;

Yet if the Flying Dutchman could not 'scape,
Why, how should I ?—But for this family,—
Presenting me at once with a full-grown heir
Is mighty sudden. And it isn't decent.

I'm all for being decent now.

Is that big man my son, though ? What's his
trade ?

Is he a large eater ?—Be dutiful,
My son, honour your poor dear worthy father,
Who so unselfish was he at great pains
Begot you, and to whom you owe that now
You hunger in this miserable world.

Surely this asks a large return in love,
Such care for your well-being, and you still
Unborn ? I hope you have it for me, son ?
But don't salute me ; we've embraced already ;
Your loving is too violent for me.

Mother. Let him but kiss you. Child, will
you kiss your father ?

Son. Yes, I will kiss him.—O I like this
cunning.

Mother. You know me now, dear ?

Tramp. If you're she I think,
I may as well admit that yon's my boy.
Strange, but I never thought of you as still
Alive.

Mother. I'm filled with you, my brain and heart.
You make me foolish, dear. For deep within me
Some vague discomfort lies, a dumb warning,
Which cannot come into my thought for you
Taking so much room there. Just now, when I
Was stricken with you, and into its wont,
Long dry of it and closed, the love ran warm,
And I was all in pangs of the sudden loosening,
A sharp fear flasht in me ; something there was
I must provide against : but what it was
I cannot tell for sure. It must wait, then ;
It may come back.—And now, your hand's in
mine !

The thing must give place in my thought to that.
—You are silent, Michael.

Tramp. Am I ? Well, I suppose
It's too much happiness is gagging me,——
What did you say your name was ?

Mother. Alice. Ah ! [*She sighs.*]

Tramp (springing up). No !
Not she ? Not Alice ? O I did not think it was
you.

You've been a sorrow, Alice.—Why have you come

To spoil my dear regrets ?—The others were
Despairs, not loves. I would meet any of them
Nor wince ;—but you !—O Lord, am I ashamed ?
No, I'd liever not have found you.

Son (aside). More long,
Surely, than needs. There's one chance missed
already.

Tramp. I have bitterly blamed you, boy ; but
I forgive.

Your coming frightened me away from her
A many years ago ; but let that be.
In sign whereof, come here and you may kiss me.
Pardon the lack of veal ; I don't keep cows.

Mother. Ah, thank you, Michael. For he is
Our love, and kissing him will be to take
That to your heart again. I will lead you to
him——

O God, what's this ?

Tramp. You choke me : free my throat,
Blast you !

Mother. Let him go, fool, it's not the man.
I've changed my mind, too. Hear me, you
devil, loose him !

Tramp. Did you mean this, Alice ?

[*The struggle ends.*]

Mother. Is he dead, my God, dead ?

Son. Why, he was weak and frail under my hands ;

You mistook his danger. I've not failed you
now ?

And you were always saying that I would.

Will you not praise me, mother ?—

(*Whimpering*) Why don't you speak ?

*Mother. (She has been sitting bowed over the dead
man. Slowly she raises her head and looks at
her son, dry-eyed.)*

This crime is mine.—O cramp is at my heart.—

I have the guilt. I need not so have grieved

About your eyes : it was I who was blind.

I know not how to bear you close to me,

The touch of your hands will be a fearful thing

For me henceforth.—Give me your hands in
mine ;

The Lord in Heaven knows nothing can be

To any human soul more horrible

Than these poor dreadful hands : therefore I kiss
them,

And it may do for prayer. At Judgement Day

Tell them, my child, you did not make his death.

I will not share it. It is all mine.

THE FOOL'S ADVENTURE

THE FOOL'S ADVENTURE

IN FOUR DIALOGUES

I

The Seeker.

A Hermit.

SEEKER. I know, between all kinds of the
world there are
No layers, no division : stone, leaf, flesh,—
All's flowing, like a stream of many waters.
But like a spilth of oil in the stream
Man's nature the same current flows along
Unmixing in the general kindliness,
Showing like slime against the deep wise water.
All Being with Mankind and the sin of Man
Refuses mixture ; Sin is for man alone ;
Yet is he carried down the same tendency
As the great pomp of all the creatures goes.
Who, that has read into the soul of man,
But is not ware that man's unhappiness,
Wherein he lives as in a smoke, comes hence ?

He travels the same way, under the same force,
 As all the beasts ; yet being not a beast,
 And this is Sin. What I must find is how
 Man may be man, yet sinless.

Hermit. It is with mind
 That thou hast read Man and the World ?

Seeker. How else ?

Hermit. Thou hadst done better with love.

Seeker. I take not that.

Hermit. The mind is to interpret to the heart :
 Only the heart can answer to the world ;
 Mind knows the speech, but the heart the meaning.

Seeker. Well, to my question. Where grows
 the root of sin ?

What a strong thing it is ! Almost it seems
 That Good is only if Sin lets it be.

Who is the monger of Man's Good and Bad ?
 What knowest thou of the world ? Knowest
 thou this ?

But that can hardly be, for thou hast not,
 I have heard say, left once this little valley
 These twenty years ago. And nowadays
 Experiment not musing is the thing.
 Thou canst not know the ways of men.

Hermit. My son,
 These many years I have not been perplexed
 With the loud manners that fill all the towns

Of little-thoughted men. Here in my hut
I have perused with all my sense the earth,
And never once out of this valley gone.
I think, better I know the world than those
Who take abroad, into strange lands, small minds,
And choke their wonder,—that, the only sluice,
Easily out of gear, where through may pour
The pressure of Truth outside us, the deep world
Our enclosed minds are sunk in,—that they choke
And clutter up with gluts of rarities,—
Voyage the warm seas, where mild as mercy blow
Molucca breezes from the nutmeg woods,
Or brave the festering Congo and the jaws
Of crocodiles that guard Zambezi fords,
Through feverous land and a drumming din of flies
Up to the thirst of Tartary, and beyond,
Adventuring into the Northern night,
To roam the haunted frosts, and hear far off
Ice-thunder round the pole, the shouldering floes.
As farmers put heapt trash in an empty barn
They store in corners of their memories
Lumber from all the climes. Has foreign ground
More meaning in it than an English field?
But I, still staying in this upland hollow,
Where the earth gets up in royal attitudes
About me, sovereign for leagues, the first ground
The weather treads on, visiting the plains,

Do better with my hills and silences.

That mountain yonder—look how the fells rise
And lift themselves endeavouring, till they achieve
Power upon space and a ken not disturbed,—

The unconcernèd summit of grey stone, /

Aloof in its own wisdom, greatly calm:

And not a tree to break the mighty swerve
Up into the middle sky, the whole upheaval
Plain to be seen. The figure of that hill

If one should spend a life considering,
He would not die ignoble ; and it would
Outlast a long life's questioning. Besides,

I have the continual workings of the air,
Who, that is wise, has ever tired of these ?
Never an hour has been, since I came here,
That I could look upon nor be amazed.

Look at this rain now ; that was a great event !

A darkened murmurous half-hour of rain
And hidden stormwork on the mountain-heads,—

Out of the clefts and off the ledges pours
The drenching (but its work is left behind)

And down the scarred cliff-sides suddenly lives
A white releasement of a hundred streams,
A gleam like weather'd marble-veins in the sun.

For, ere the shower seems well begun, the last
Tatters of its proof gloom are leaving us,
Drawn after the hasty errand of the storm ;

The sagg'd awning furls, and sunshine is let in.
And now that the dinning rain is gone, a voice
Known dimly through the rattling past talks plain,—
The water milling the heavy stones, and long
Grumbling of boulders from their beds dislodged ;
Like buried roar of gongs that have been heard
Sounded in faery halls under the hills.
And all the pother—wherefore ? Half a day
Maybe it takes for the spate to fulfil itself
(From here to the sea is scarce a score of miles),
To bank its load of gravel privily
In thievish guarded cellars of the water,
Then into new storms, and all is to do again.
Wherefore ?—No need for me to ask Wherefore ?
I know it part of a Self, as a stray feeling,
A startle, say, at a chance sound, is part
Of my Self. He who has wondered all so well
As I these twenty years at streams and hills,—
Who has become their rashness, been their bulk,
Going into their nature, putting on
Their being and their mood and their old usage,—
Knows that of all this world there is a Self ;
And, in some region of existence, lies
The Presence of this Self. Nor deem, my son,
Thy race a thing apart, not common kind
With Earth, these hills, that lake and its margent
reeds

That greenly dusk over the evening in it.
 It may be, we are close to the wheel's rim here,
 Touching the hooping tire of forged law,
 And things seem separate ; but all, like spokes,
 Are towards the nave, and fixt in it at root,
 The Self of the World. There is the authority
 Of the brook's speed, and of Man's Good and
 Bad.

Seeker. And there, in the presence of this self,
 will be
 The mastery of Sin ?

Hermit. There, if at all.
 But who may talk with it ? Or who shall go
 Into its place ?

Seeker. Truly, if none e'er tries,
 None knows.

Hermit. Well, if you go to find this thing,
 Your journeying must be through reigns of mind
 Rather than lands and tongues.

Seeker. It must be tried.

II

The Seeker.

I have achieved. That which the lonely man
 Spoke of, core of the world, that Self, I know.

Like one small pool to the reach of Heaven, I
Am open to a vastness. Harken, thou,
Do I not know thee right? Thou art the deep
Whereunto all things yearn unwearyingly,
Some unaware, some hating that they yearn,
But all into a stillness, into Thee,
Falling at length, and their unrest is done,
Until again thou blurt them out of thee,
Out of the middle to the rind. And yet
Not them, but piecemeal what they were
New-fangled into other companies.

It is as if, not only once, far off,
Aloof from place and being I had watched
The spell betwixt two happenings end again ;—
The dark's distress, slow qualms mastering it,
Blind thrills, and last, the sudden pang of light.
Methinks, plainly as I've felt earth's swoon
Wince at the touch of spring, awakening her,
The peace, thy region, shudder I have felt
When with it meddles thy new imagining ;
And in the smooth element, ruffling, grows a
throb,

Marring with its strong rhythm the prone calm,
Beat of the fresh beginning of an order ;
One settled eddy at last, whose scouring kirtles
Gather to substance and perplexèd shape,
To thickening spots of coarse, and curds of fire.

Again within the uniform'd principle
Stress, that it have a grain ; and yet more stress,
Till the unbounded shiver of light shatter
Innumerously, and into the clear inane
Come like a ghost another swarm of motes
Shepherded by thy thought into new flocks,
Away from thee, outward, circling, numberless
kinds ;

Yet the same partner, the old lust, is with them,
Unrest, severance from thy quietude.
Nor first, nor last of them, this swirl of stars,
Unlike the others, but in this thing like.
I from the place in Being called Mankind
Am come, seeking thee, and look, I know thee.
Not with my sense and reason only ; these
Man fashioned for near needs of common life :
Good tools, but to find thee of no more use
Than ladders to thatch houses reach the sun.
Not Reason finds thee, though he walk with gait
Taking gulfs in his stride as far across
As in his yearly bout the throw of Saturn.
My wisdom was to practice with the power
Emotion, since I knew it was, though stall'd
In Somewhere, yet a piece of the Everywhere.
I knew my soul or self lied, when she said
Thoroughly she knew that stud of forces named
My body,—they all knew her and obeyed :

For this her hand did never bit, nor could.
Because it was more honourable than she
And all her royalty of sense and reason,
I humbled her and these before this thing,
And taskt them with a long and bitter work
To build a watch-tower, that the gaze therefrom
Might peer over the impracticable dykes
Of nature ; in that roofless hermitage,
Unneighbour'd of Life, but viewing the whole
Fate,

This thing I found in me, Emotion, watched ;
And all Fate spake with her, like as the noise
Of shawms and sackbuts may wake fellowship
In a harp's unused strings ; 'twas so she thrilled
Answerably to Fate as to a din,
The Emotion I have in me, being in tune
With Fate, the greater passion with the less,
Each to the other kith. 'Tis this in me,
Thou Self of the World, that knows thee now.

And now

That thou art known, what answer, Self of the
World ?

The Voice of the World.

So I am known. And which of my desires
Has won to know itself, and so known me ?

Seeker. I am Man. Man knows thee here.

The bitter discomfort to be part of thee,
So fiercely burns within him that the white flame
Called Consciousness ousts from its habitation
All but its own delusion, its lamp of pain,
Dafts from man's wit the clew thou hold'st him by,
Cheats him to think he may have power to follow
Laws of his own, not thine,—that he is not
In thee, worsening his lot tenfold,
Making him still tug at the biting gyves.
For this does man accuse thee. Hast thou not
Power upon thine actions? Surely, Lord.
Do so, that man is never more a nest
For sin. The chief thing thou hast given Man
Is, that he has the noble power to hate
Himself: to be aware of the flange of Law,
Which is to hate it, though he know it not.
And what is Law but the feeling after Thee,
The blind desire in things to be at one
With thee? So Man desireth, and alone
Hates his desire, the main thing in his being.
Man has gone out of the large commonalty;
The rapture and the kinship of the earth,
The strained blue ecstasy of the night and stars,
The faith whereby the mountains still endure
In their old attitude of prayer, the psalm
Of young brooks, and the loud seas' prophecy,—
No like to these for Man, no part in this

The one thing common through the world that
makes

Life of the flesh, flame of the marrying atoms,
Strength of the hills, speed of the airs, be one.
He hates the law, and therefore hates himself,
Hates Thee, that is. Thou see'st what comes of
this ?

With desperate flings he tries to be rid of Law,
But only makes the flange gride harshlier ;
The beasts lust blindly, but Man craftily,
For pleasure : but 'tis as a fever thirsts ;
To Man alone, from the dust his footsteps mark
Gives nature to lift eyes and see the large
Kind-season'd region that he travels through ;
But also (and this asks for all his gaze)
Gives him to see Death sitting by the way,
To measure fearfully the space between
His robe clutcht, and grim alms demanded of him ;
Self knowledge wretched for self-ignorance happy,
This is thy doing. Does this seem to thee
Good ?

World. Peace, for here be neither good nor bad ;
I am myself, not Man. Thou knowest me ?
Not so. I am not sinful, nor am good.
Atoms have their own nature, and the stars,
All life, slime, spawn, grass, birds and beasts,
their own,

Each than the last more manifold, a new kind.
 The thing that, quickening in the beast's dark brain,
 Made the beast no more beast but Man, was Sin ;
 White courses to the stars, and sin to man.
 Thus is it to me ;—to thee, it is not good ?
 And what have I to do with this ?

Seeker.

Art thou

He to whom Man lifts his thought, the God ?
 But no, I think thou art some outer devil,
 Filching the voice of Him who is within
 The clouds of Time and the World, hangings
 that hide
 God and his love and zeal.

World.

But, if thou wilt,

What thou art I will shew to thee.

My thought

Moved in its brooding, and its movement stirred
 A ripple in the quiet of the waters
 Whereunder my thought's Sabbath is moored
 deep,—

The region of the happening of my Will.
 And when my act, this ripple's viewless travel,
 In its upheaval reacht the upper calm
 Laid on the mere, whose waters are my Will,
 Whose surface is Appearance and broad Place,
 Its breaking whirls became a journeying wave,
 That at the last became a gathered sea,

A pile of all the waters in one tide.
 But it is grown to its height ; and now, before
 The smooth heapt power tumbles down in surf,
 Its head is whiten'd with an age of spray,
 Weakness beginning. Lo, that spray is Man,
 Crest of the wave, and token of its downfall.
 Not stately, like the early wave, nor clear,
 Nor with an inner lodging for the light,
 But troublous, misty, throwing off the light
 In glitter, all apieces, loose, uneasy.
 Truly my act is near its end when thou,
 Man, the loose spray, ride on its stooping neck,
 From one firm bulk of waters, one onward gang,
 Broken away to be a brawl of drops,
 Freedom and hither-thither motions light,
 Each drop one to itself, a discrete self.
 Thou freedom, thou high self-acquaintance, thou
 Sin,
 Man, dost thou know me ? But now know
 thyself.

III

*The Seeker.**A Sage.*

Seeker. At first I thought it was not God ; but
 now
 I have no hope left. For I went abroad

Asking for certain knowledge of God's goodness,
Which none could give me. Then at last I saw,
Although his speaking squared not with my wish,
There was no cause to doubt my reason's word,
That the World's Self must be what man calls
God.

Sage. Give not up lightly.

Seeker. Was this a light thing,
After my hopes and seekings, to find God
Careless, nay, bitterly mocking man for sin ?

Sage. I am an old man talkative and dreamy,
This search of thine remembers me of one
Strange dream I had a many winters gone.
Shall I have patience from thee if I tell it ?

Seeker. I came here for advice, not dreams. I
guess,
Whether thou hast my patience or hast not,
I shall not leave thee till it's told. Is it long ?

Sage. It was a slave, and he toiled with a kern
Made, as it seemed, of one blue shining stone,
Clearer and bluer than Eryri's waters.
And the kern held strange corn, gold grains and
silvern,

Which, being ground, threw up a dust of light,
And motes of light were tangled in his hair,
And like a gramary the glittering chaff
Misted that crooked toil, that fair it seemed,

86 INTERLUDES AND POEMS

Nothing so radiant as that slavery.

Where was that strange corn sown ? said I, and
who

Is master of thee and so rare a kern ?—

He turned, and lookt at me through the bright
haze.

He was an angel, and the sapphire kern
The hollow heaven, and the corn he ground
Was all the silver stars and golden suns.

Still of that grist and brittle light I askt :
What acre was it drilled in, by whose hand ?—

I was not at the sowing, answer'd he ;
But He who ploughed, whose coulter brake the
clods,

Told me His Word was sown at large in a field
Broad cast, and soon would spring. I watched
for it ;

Lo, this was the crop,—His Word, but so en-
wrapt,

So huskt in light, so sheathed in a harsh rind,
Long must I bray it, blowing off the chaff
And shining flaky scabbards of the Word,
This corn, before the Word itself I find.

But I was wiser than the angel then ;
And I suppose he's grinding still, unless
His Master has been by, and told him light
And all such husks are quite fit things for study.

Who looks to find the Word by freeing it
From casing draff, is like when his shift ends
To have found nought else but husk. Be sure
If anything seems dirt and husk to you,
You're not the man is going to find the Word.

Seeker. Here's nought to my purpose. But thy
memory

Leaks, I suppose, like all old vessels do.
My quest, as I have told thee once, is this :
Out of the brutish rose up man : the clay
Upon the wheel of years became a jar ;
But when 'twas fully fashion'd, it had caught
From some strange shower liquour such as clay
Never before was moist with : Man was sinful.
Why he, who let shape Man, should so have used
His work, pouring into him Sin, I seek.
The clay were better still an unhandled lump
Than wrought only to hold such sour evil.
But if it be possible, I would find what means
May empty Man of sin : this was my quest ;
But what hope, now that I have talkt with God
And heard Him speak ?—A raven's voice, his bill
Up to the neesings sunk in a lamb's wet life,
His chuckling greed half-smother'd in the warm
inwards,
That scarce he could bark his kill, so choked,
would sound

Startling the quiet of a hill-shut noon
 In sunny early summer kindlier
 Than when God talkt with me.

Sage. When didst thou talk
 With God ?

Seeker. Have I not told thee ?—the world's
 soul

I knew, and is not that the God ?

Sage. Poor fool,
 And didst thou think this present sensible world
 Was God ?

Seeker. No, not the knowledge of the senses,
 But the world's heart ; the gathering place of all
 Being : the weir of all the flowing Powers,
 The limbeck whereinto are poured all storms
 And quiets, duties of the elements,
 Whether to be firm standing or steep ruin
 And all betwixt, man and his mind among them,
 To be confused there and throed forth again ;
 The sea whose measureless tide conquers its
 shores,
 Then, ebbing, buildeth of far-journeying silt
 New wharves, mud all astir with a writhe of
 growth,
 Till the deep want them, and they move again,
 Knowing whose hand upon their shoulders laid :
 Then is a curdle of worlds loosed again

And is abroad in the great deep again,
I mean the soul, that feeds on many dooms
And waits now for this world ; there is allowed
Nor part, nor kind, nor shape, in space or time,
Therein, nor law ; but these come out of it.
Over its own expressions, heavens and stars,
Fires and lightnings, life, thought, sin and pain,
The ever widening roundures of the work
One act thrown up by it must make, it broods ;
But they, remembering That whence they came,
Each gathered crowd of things, and of Its presence
Deeply aware, by fine unthinkable nerves
Are tied to it, and have it for a self.

Sage. Just that, for one who thinks, does the
World mean.

And that thou thoughtest God ?

Seeker. I did.

Sage. Therefore

I said, Poor fool.

Seeker. What is it then ?

Sage. The world ?

It is a name.

Seeker. What wilt thou mean ? What name ?

Sage. The name Lord God chooses to go by,
made

In languages of stars and heavens and life,
The senses life achieves, and wills and lusts

Up to the top of life, man and his sin,
All is the writing of the name of God.

Seeker. Fantastic and quite out of date. But I
Have cleaned my senses' panes of spider-work
That ignorance webs on them, know the world
Not a blurred shadowy thing, that darkling peers
(Uncertain which is world, which window's dirt,)
Into the mind, a ghost ; a real world mine.
I know this growth about me, stones, herbs,
beasts ;

Stars and their golden games in the blue heaven
I know, and the life that runs through all, and
what

It runs towards ;—how the grand heats will be
A stupid frost, and all the young lustful matter
Decrepit, gone unhandsomely into crumbs.

And I, perhaps the sole of living minds,
Know what this is,—the end of separation,
The return to the self of this happening.

I know that all, while here in their proper
strength,

Are present to the self, I know that all
Feel that the Self is 'ware of them,—Enough ;
The Self under the world is real, the world
Is therefore real in it. And how jumps this
With what thou talk'st of a Name ?

Sage.

Easily.

As the meaning to the letters or the sound,
So that, thou call'st a Self, is to the World ;
This, the characters ; that, the Name indeed.

Seeker. Ay, I have heard thou art a poet. So
All trials such as I do on the world
Are nothing to thy fantasy. And yet
I failed, for that which I uncovered was
No monger of the good and bad. Where then
Wons he who holds the store of good and bad ?
Is there another ? Canst thou tell me aught ?

Sage. I have not travelled much, but I have
talkt
With those who in far regions used to fare.
And they, among encounters and strange tales,
Oft mention of a king whose palace lies
Upon the edge of place, the verge of things.
None ever found admittance at his gate ;
All manner of war has spent itself against
His cliffy walls, never an embassy
Won to his presence. So the neighbouring kings
(And great lords they) speak of him as their Lord.
I tell the rumours as I had them told.
But it is said, Sin has been heard to boast
(Some have known Sin and have had speech with
him)
He knew a postern, and the trick of its lock,
Whereby he might, at any time, be in

The house of the unseen king. It may be, then,
 A parley with this prince, could it be had,
 Were helpful to the shutting up of Sin ;
 As, if one prayed him set a hidden guard
 Behind the postern, which might seizure make
 Upon this insolent intruding Sin
 When next he dares creep into holy rooms.
 Or if, as I have thought, this unknown Power
 Be he that doth commission Sin, then ask
 For why is his employment, on what grounds
 Sin's warrant were withdrawn ; so strike with him
 A treaty. Maybe thou wilt find in him
 Thy monger of the good and bad. Come then
 And I will tell thee all that I have heard
 About the roads that go to this king's house.

IV

The Seeker.

Who is within this darkness ?

The Voice from Within.

Whom thou seekest.
 Adventure thou no further. Not for thee,
 If any road beyond my dwelling goes.

Seeker. Is there no wicket through this barrier'd gloom,
Uncertainty wall'd against my ken? Unlatch,
If to thy place be any door.

Within. Not gloom,
Impotence; thou canst not understand my being,
My shape and the dimensions it inhabits
Are nought thy senses take, nor yet thy main
Intelligence. Therefore my presence is
Shut to them, dark. Theirs is the gaol, not mine.

Seeker. But whom I seek, thou art?

Within. None other, I.

Seeker. Art thou the monger of the Good and
Bad?

Within. I am.

Seeker. Ah, I am come at my desire;
Now there is hope for thee, poor earth. Hearken,
Strange king; knowst thou that Sin?

Within. I know him well.
He is now with me, here.

Seeker. What, is Sin rooft
Under thy unplaced weather, within this weld
Of powers unknowable, thy house?

Within. Ay, here.

Seeker. But, when I left the world, he was
among us,
Busy.

Within. And still is in the world, and busy ;
Yet is he here.

Seeker. I pray thee, keep him penn'd.
I think thou canst not know how ill he does
Down there, among us men. Didst thou not
think

Our life was to be clean, one purity,
One beauty, as the rain drops make one bow,—
Perchance, of all the many little minds,
One brain, capable of thy knowledge ? Look,
I pray thee, how Sin spoils thy hope, whate'er
That was, but surely not the thing life is.
Look down from where thou art, the Heaven, and
see

His meddling ; how his enlargèd skill turns life
Into a foul unseemly mess—no good
A-hover o'er it now, nor able ever
Unto a higher state of Time to reach,
But still unshapen'd, crude, unworkt by Law
Into another quality, to sprawl,
Stuff not worthy Law's craft to fashion, waste
Of being, unsound, that will not bear the
tongs

And hammering of thy workman, as all else
Is forged and smitten into new kinds and better,—
That will not answer to his handling, give
Obedience to his tools, being rotten, mixt

With sullen wrong. Thus has Sin done with life,
Beseech thee, pen him close, far off, O Lord.

Within. That would be hard to do.

Seeker. Yet surely thou
Hatest this foul-toucht grimly Sin ?

Within. Sometimes
Full bitterly I hate him, and sometimes
He is my friend.

Seeker. O my hurt soul, thy friend ?
But thou hast power over him ?

Within. It may be.

Seeker. And good and bad, these are thy
mongery ?

Within. They are, as I have said.

Seeker. None else controls them ?

Within. None else controls or portions Good
and Bad.

Seeker. Then thou art God ?

Within. Ay, many call me so.
And yet, though words were never large enough
To take me made, I have a better name.

Seeker. Then truly, who art thou ?

Within. I am Thy Self.

AN ESCAPE

AN ESCAPE

Among mountains. *Idwal*, a poet.

I DWAL. A swift dark dream from the outer
lands,

From the folk whose talk none understands,
Along my smooth sleep travelling,
Yet tampering not with my ken's rest,
Past as undisturbingly
As a night-jar o'er the quietude
Of the clear'd middle of a pine-wood
Seemeth to haunt the evening,
And leave the blue air yet more whist.

And yesternight it haunted me ;
Again, suddenly, quietly,
Shadowy wings above my clear sleep.
But swift, so swift it might scarce be seen ;
Not as with me it had to do,
But eagerly, as though it flew
From mystery to mystery,
And my sleep lay in between ;—

Once before, and yesternight.

So twice I have felt its noiseless flight ;
Twice has my sleep been the road
The dark message took in journeying
From the one to the other secret reign ;—
Out of the dark lying behind,
Into that lying before, man's mind,
My sleep was the only bridge for the thing
Whereon to cross Reality.

But the third time, if it come again,
A stranger, unkindly from the abode
Of Beginnings sent to the place of Dooms,
Shewing me thus so easily
Way through the skirts of time to the glooms
That march both sides our bodily place,—
My soul will up and give it chase ;
Out of my sleep my soul will slip
And ere that duty vanisheth
I'll o'ertake its moth-wing'd speed.
And be it a bird softer fledge
Than white owl or brown night-jar,
Be softer the down on the wing's edge
Than combing crests of a snow-drift are
Which the smooth wind holloweth,
Of its shadowing I will be more aware
Than a mirror is of a swoon'd man's breath,
To find the guidance that I need.

I have great need of it : like a gaol'd man
Am I, who having piteously craved
The strange use of light, is all the more thereby
Discomforted, to see how narrow his den—
The walls surpris'd leering at him, and glistening
Dank and unwholesome, sick with a waterish brash
That dribbles down and clots the drooping beards
Of long white cellar-growth, hopeless of sun ;
Qualm'd with loathing, to stare on his puddled bed,
The unclean floor, and know how he mates on it.
As it might be with such an one, with me.
To look in on my being and the room
Whereinto it is shut, I left the thorp
(Whose morning peat-smoke hanging in the elms
Is in my brain even now,—Ah, the last time !)
And lived a winter in these treeless hills,
And I, unwise, have let in light to my being ;
The rash lamp has uncovered the thing it is.

I am not one being, but caged enmity :
There are two kinds, shut by some sleight, although
More jarring when they meet than fire and water,
To fight like spider and scorpion in my mind.
And 'tis a box so narrow they are in,
Thrust face to face and knee to knee by the walls,
Lidded and luted down with kneaded flesh,
How can they loose or escape from the mewed coil ?
And so twy-spirited is my flesh. Now where

The two souls began I know not, but there's one,
 I know, that has been in Eternity
 Before 'twas snared into this crafty body,
 Still sorrows after the life it followed there ;—
 To this soul, strangely and I know not how,
 The hills, and their great way of standing, gave
 Heart, and this soul has thrown the other down ;
 It stands, in the midst of its captivity,
 The master now : but it is still in the trap.

Rarely they planned this mind, the fowlers who
 Lured with a hidden bait that unware soul
 From out the unspoken region into the work
 Contrived to gin it, this spider-work of mind.
 For if that other hold it not for the trapper,
 Yet is there no way out of his skill, the mind.
 Who is the nooser of souls, the many-rumour'd,
 The shifty-named ? I think he's the same as
 Death :

Who profits by the trap, did he not make it ?
 The toil is rigged, and the soul lies fettered there,
 And at his own good time the unheard Death
 Comes up behind and puts out dark hands, versed
 In the secret make of the mind, and takes the
 soul ;

But who the man they call Death is, and how
 He uses souls he nets, who ever told ?
 Not like, that he who goes so noiselessly

And can make snares so well, hath good intent.
But it may be, the captured in my flesh
Is not to wait for Death, insanely struggling.
Yet how to leave this place, and the difficulties
About it set, the gapless and strong pound,
The intricate mind, shutting the strayed soul fast?
For round the knowledgeable mind, which is
The sounding coloured manifold plenteous world;
Round this that is lit, much unlit region of mind
Investing lies, the dark unknown besieging
The self-known mind, the world ; yet all is mind.
Island it is, bewildered all about
With thicketted hedges, fenced and hoarded close.
And if through these the mind's prisoner wins,
then all
The marches of the mind are swamp and fen ;
No footing there, but all a flinching ground :
There thought and ken are shelving banks, washt
loose,
Fretted from firmness, trembling half afloat
In unknown tides, dark waters that emerge
From out the unnoised deep beyond, and whelm
Over the bars of place and time, intruding,
Infesting with dim sloths of flood, and then
Back to the darkness slipping, leaving gloomed
Shaking and dangerous the mind's wet coast ;—
There is no going through these lands.

And right

To my dear need, this limb of the otherwhere,
 This two nights' dream of mine, comes, easily
 Crossing the unsure dim untrodden parts
 Of foreign mind as if his wont was there.
 I think it is because the brawl is done
 Within me, and he who has lost Eternity
 Has killed the other, the dream found my sleep
 So good to fare in on his messages.
 No sleep like mine for him, and a third time
 He'll use it so. By a strange awareness
 I feel he's looking from his place to try
 The passage of my sleep again. My want
 Of him and of his skilful travelling
 Will be awake even in my sleep, and hard
 After his speed the forgotten trapann'd thing
 That was the guest of Eternity once, will run
 Out of its gaol, this World, the mind of man,
 And be again free of its birthright house.
 I have but to sleep a little, and 'tis ended.

And yet these three last nights have I hung back
 From sleep, and delayed my delivering.
 No more: the sleep-hunger dims my aching brain,
 I have no strength against it. Scarcely am I
 Moved that this is my last sight of the hills
 And the morning that they wear so joyfully.

[*A Parson comes in*

Parson. Good morning, lad : I thought I smelt your fire.

And how's the spring with you ?

Idwal. Spring ? Ay, is it Spring ?

Parson. Are you just out of bed ? But I have that

Will whet your wits. Some rascal of a tramp
Has broken in your cottage, stript it bare.

Idwal. Why, that's a pity.

Parson. It is ; bare as my hand,
The dog ! Well, I suppose you'll come down
now

And help to catch the rogue. I'm sorry for you.

Idwal. It's sorry I am for that perverted tramp,
As having gone from being the earth's friend,
Whom she would have at all her private treats.
Now with the foolery called possession he
Has dirtied his own freedom, cozen'd all
His hearing with the lies of ownership.
The earth may call to him in vain henceforth,
He's got a step-dame now, his Goods. And yet
Perhaps he's wiser. If he pawns his theft
And drinks it all, why, he's all right again.

Parson. You talkt about the sanity of the hills
(Pah !) when you came here. Did you learn this
From you commercing with them ? You'll start
tramp

Henceforward, and own nought, not even
trousers ?—

It's as I thought : the hills do you no good.

Idwal. No ? Yet they've done me all I want.

Parson. No good ;

I always thought you wrong in coming here ;

You are alive, and these bare hills are dead.

What give they you of life ? And life's the thing.

Man must find wisdom among men. Pope said—

Idwal. He did ; quite right.

Often I have not known

Up here, if I be waking or asleep ;

Yet something I have found of Life.

Parson.

Ay, fancies,

Poet's reveries. One must *see* life, though.

Idwal. I have come near to seeing Life.

Parson.

Up here ?

Idwal. Maybe it's not what you call seeing Life ;

It served for me though. This is what it was.

I saw where walkt a Spirit in the skies,

But not himself I saw, only a robe

Large-folded, pale ; like rain seen from a height,

When to the sightless going of the wind

It clings, down narrows in the hills deep-hewn,

A flapping steam gathered to the huge gait ;

And shews a stature mightier than the mountains,

Blotting them out, to such a spacious stride

Waving, loose from the wind's shoulders in broad
trail

So kingly drawn, crags underneath its hem.
So, unsure as the wet wind's grey garment,
I saw the Spirit walk, holding a storm
About him, wearing Life. Not whence it came,
The downward misty shower of Life, I saw,
Nor where it fell, but only that the Spirit
Had put its falling as a vesture round him.
But listen now :

What is to let the Spirit putting off
His wrap? Suppose it be of no more use,
And he unbrooch it at the neck, uncloak
Himself of the web of carded waters, Life,
Cumbersome grown, and lay it on the ground?
What then of Life? A pool in a flat place
Alone to mark where once was thrown in a heap
The work of shimmer, a godly piece of craft,
Carelessly, as outworn, taken away
From being a fine spinning and a rayment,
Its fashion lost, only the substance left
Discarded, valueless, and not accounted,
Out of it all the skill that gave it worth.
See you?—But does not this look dangerous?—
I would escape from Life.

Parson.

Then, I suppose,
You are after death?

Idwal.

What use is Death to me ?

I spoke of Life as one broad tissued thing,
A whole, seamless and woven right across.
You, when you speak of life, mean still—Yourself.
To my seeing, with a random light that lives
And shifts within the web, the cloak is shot ;
And where the gleam comes, there is thought and
feeling,

But shadow overtakes the rippling sheen,
And then the vagrom tide sets back again.
Death is the light removed ; but you are still
In the same elements as when you lived,
When the light visited you ; although you change
The habit of the sun for a dark wont
You do but shift your nation. Yet have I hope,
Though tangled thus in Life, to win escape.

Parson. To one like you, who sees so widely,
then,

The matter of Self must be a thing too small
To be considered ?

Idwal.

But because I have learnt
Myself up here I would escape from Life.

Parson. Well, let us have your notions of the
self.

Idwal. There is war in man.

Parson.

Ay, you are not the first
To find that out.

Idwal. As far as concerns me
I am the first, however,
Parson. What is your war?
Idwal. It is of two desires.
Parson. Right, flesh and soul.
Idwal. I know not what those two words
mean. I say,
Desire of infinite things, desire of finite.
But what you call your soul is more than half
The finite longing, and the infinite
Is all a cripple and a starveling in you.
But still, though maimed, it keeps the struggle up,
For 'tis the wrestle of the twain makes man.
—As two young winds, schooled 'mong the
slopes and caves
Of rival hills that each to other look
Across a sunken tarn, on a still day
Run forth from their sundered nurseries, and
meet
In the middle air, forgetting that they meant
A game there, each with his hold the other's flight
Hampering, till their spent lockt hatred falls
Troublesome on the lake, a foolish whirl
Of crooked motions dinting upon the calm
Which from its seat the sky had taught the
waters ;
So must these two desires, when they meet,

Grapple so fast their either aim is lost,
 But in a wrangle round each other spin ;
 And each puts out his strength, not to go onward,
 But quite to baulk and hinder and capsize
 This insolent assault of the wrong desire :
 And when they close, their struggle is called Man,
 Distressing with his strife and flurry the bland
 Pool of existence, that lay quiet before
 Holding the calm watch of Eternity.

—He has another name, and that is—Evil.

Parson. And neither ever gets the upper hand ?

Idwal. Ay, one not seldom—not the Infinite.
 But if the finite longing has advantage
 And need not give his whole force to the fight,
 Then have you painters, singers,—I was one ;
 I am not now, the other is lord now.
 But till the time when, three months back, I came
 To this austerest earth, and left behind
 Orchards and plains, by that desire I was
 So mastered, that I never lookt at aught
 Except to herd Time's flocks : enough for me
 If on an early autumn afternoon
 The whole country air smelt burning, and the
 blue

Wood-smoke loitered about the yellowing copse
 And misted all the rides, and the earth seemed
 To catch her breath and with a frightened air

Stand in the middle of her summer dance
Surprised, still holding in her listless hands
The fruits and flowers of her game, all tranced
In a glad posture, but a wild appeal
Setting her eyes and lips wide, what may mean
This strange sweet mischief working in her breast,
This longing of her limbs and heart for sleep.
Or could I be in a steep-sided dene
When the new gladness makes a straining song
Sleek every speckled throat, and at my feet
The turf is flower'd and makes sweet the breath
Of cattle, and between the blue there hangs
The golden green awakening of the oak,—
That was enough. But this is ended now,
And now the infinite desire within me
So easily reigns, shy things that not belong
To space or time may travel through me, free
From meetings with the impudent questioning
Of thoughts that have to do with size or shape,
Encounterings with matter, when it is
The kind called Memory. My friend, a man
Who has been way for these wandered strangers
looks
After them gone, and sickens to be with them
Out of the world, and out of measurement.
Who knows our little world of din
Beleaguered round with silences,

Listens from out this noisy inn
 To catch some rumour of the peace,
 The quiet that around him is,
 Soon finds the talkative throng'd room
 Too close about him, too shut in,
 And yearns to go from light to gloom.

Parson. As you do, I suppose. But how is he
 To leave the world, since Death is of no use ?

Idwal. Better visitors there be
 That come to some few men than he,
 The noiselessly-shod murderer,
 So skilled in using his kind knife.
 And where they come there's no more fear
 Of staying in the toil of life,
 Or being in death's captivity.

Parson. Now listen to me, boy. You have not
 thought,
 It may be, you are doing wrong ; but I,
 Who know, I tell you here and now, you are ;
 This talk of life as a haphazard thing,
 This strange distaste for being, is all wrong
 And gravely wrong.

Idwal. Before my winter here
 Wrong was a meaning to me. O, I went
 Much in large vision of the good and bad :
 The flies of hell blackening on the world,
 And angels doing chores up and down heaven.

But lately quite another view of both
I got : I learnt to go outside my mind,
So saw the ministers of good and bad
In their own proper likeness,—not as they
Earnestly masquerade before us men.
When to the world, which is man's mind, they
come

They have a part to play : 'tis only a part ;
Outside, they are one set,—and foolish talk
It is that says they hate each other there.
I slipt outside the world once, and there pried
Upon a festival ; fragrant it was
Of wine poured lavishly and spilt about
On the blue floor, like golden morning spilt
Over the sky ; and you breathed music there.
You cannot think how blithe a fellowship,
How frank, was over all that gathering.
Angels and devils made up the whole party,
Sitting lovingly paired, wing laid to wing,
Leathery close to feathery, bat and bird ;
Or dancing, wicked paws clasping white waists,
The delicate feet of angels twinkling bright
Among the hairy shins of fiends. 'Twas all
Clipping and dancing, good with evil, friends.
But where I go, nor good nor evil is.

Parson (to himself). Poor lad ! No use for me
to talk with him.

Hazel perhaps can do it. I were best
 Leave them together.

[*Aloud.*

Hazel is close behind.

She needs must kneel among the primroses
 And lift them up where I had trod on them,
 Strange girl !

Idwal. Hazel is coming here, you said ?
 (*To himself.*) Ah, that stirs you, partner of mine ?
 Malingering were you ? Still alive ?
 But you shall not handle me again.

[*Hazel comes in. The Parson goes.*

Hazel. Good morning, brother. But how pale
 you look.

Your eyes, it is not health, such light in them.
 And once they had a way of looking glad
 If they saw me come near. What is it, dear ?

Idwal. No, Hazel, you are nothing to me now,
 Nor all the world, nor all the songs I made.
 I've found a better thing than you or these,
 And I am leaving you and all of them.

Hazel. Are you ill, brother ? dying ?

Idwal. Nor ill nor dying,
 But bidding God be with you, for my hand
 Has found the latch it felt for, and the door
 Is opening now that lets me out of the house
 Of sky and earth ; the winds that are without
 Have learnt my name, and I must go to them.

They breathe against the door, impatient for me ;
They have called to me, and I have hearken'd
them :

Whether I would or no, they draw me now
Beyond beyond, into the elder dark.

And now I turn to you for the last time.

I do not see your eyes again, Hazel.

Hazel. You must come back with us and we
will nurse you.

You dying and the Spring come down again !

Idwal. I am not dying, Hazel. I will try
To shew you how it is with me, Sweetheart—
Ah, that was wont spake, not myself, believe me.
Has it not been with you, all your spirit
Held by some beauty of the earth, as if
An outer voice startled you with your name,
Taking you out of the Hour's snake-eyed charm?—
Like a child, all intent upon his game,
Hears his dead mother softly calling him.
So held was I. With fine deceits and toils,
Nets of delight mastering all my limbs,
Prisoner was I in beauty of the earth,
And never knew my bondage : I heard no call.
—If you lie still, you may be tied with ropes
And be at ease. I know not why I paid
Heed all at once to the disquieting voice.
But when I did, my skin found, sure enough,

The ropes were there. But that is done ; I step
 Out of the writhen cordage I have fought,
 The strangling of the world I freed my limbs from,
 Thrown, see, at my feet, the foolish yarns.
 I could have sworn they lived, and had within
 them

Striving, that made their bodies thicken and shrug
 And roughen scales to rasp my skin, and hold
 Against my labouring tight. What was mere rope
 While I lay still, soon as I strained at it
 Became a league of snakes. Well, they are dead,
 And the world's felony has failed with me.
 This was my winter's work up here, and now
 I'm free to take the bidding of the voice.

Hazel. What voice? O love, it's not been
 good for you,
 This lonely winter here among the hills.

Idwal. Hazel, you love me?—No, don't say
 you do,
 But if you do, I'd have you speak not quite
 So tenderly. (I had forgot that break
 Comes in her speaking when she's sorry,—at least
 I thought that pang in me was dead that wont
 Leap in my heart at it, like a shrill string
 Across my soul shuddering. Pray God
 She speak not so again). Will you not see
 We are all changed ?

This is not he you played with. I have been
In furnaces up here. You need not bring
Love to me now ; 'tis a tune I have no use for.
What, will you still look so ? I tell you, he
Whose thoughts had more obedience for you
Than for the wind the barley has, and more
Husht speaking at your way, he is done, spoilt.
Upon that self, that reeved and wrangling twist
Of forces, that fierce marriage of two hates
Or loves (what we call love and hate are one),—
That seeming quiet made of greeds, there toucht
Release like fire, cheating the earth's hold,
Blessedly saving me from consciousness.
Out of the cinders it was bound in ran
The secret of the ore, fined, ready for founding ;
And what was one thing, now is plainly two
Though in one body kept ; the trial Self
Withstood not, but bewrayed its making close,
That it is twain. My Self has come to an end.
And yet the consummation hangs ; to halve
Wholly and all asunder put my being.
But it will come ; I shall be loosed, and then
Caught up by the hair out of the unseeing race
At once I am no longer part of the world,
But like the rush of waters o'er one drowned,
The lapse of all the worlds slurs over me
One fire, run into one broad streaming flame

Going its unknown errand across space,
 And leaves me in the naked dark, alone,
 Large, and one of the first and latter things
 That were before limit and certainty
 And this old unhealth, from the beginning mixt
 Into them, Consciousness, the disease. And now,
 No longer tied, not altogether freed,
 Will you come here to mischief me with love ?
 Go from me. O if you but knew how I
 Am looking to be taken out of me,
 Out of the toil of Self, the fixity
 In mixture of these two unreconciled,
 Each with desire it sickens at and loathes
 Fastened to each,—you would not tease me thus.

Hazel. Ah, this is some false doing from outside :

You, whose glad senses stood so open, you
 Who never failed of welcome for the green
 And blue and gold of earth, who took in sun
 And the grey presence of the rain alike, to be
 Beauties within your heart, you to be harmed !—
 This very morning, as I left the house,
 I lookt up through the woods that hang behind,—
 (For nowhere in the world surely is blue
 So good for the heart as that of the early year
 Between black leafless trunks at a slope's top)—
 And looking up, lo, green against the blue !

Spring in her first glad hurry through the land
Had left on thorn and branch tatters and light
Frayings of her green careless robe. I thought,
Here is the Spring, and he'll be with us soon.
And then I thought of our delaying love.
It's gone from you then? But it's still with me.
My sister has a baby, a week old,—
To see her mothering it!—and I—never?
What am I saying?—
Love, do you hear me, love?—Is that word
Empty for you? nothing alight left in it?
See if I fill it not with stars again.
Look on me, and think, All of her is mine.
Does it not burn you? See, now I bare my arm.
Is it not well done, a good work, this flesh?—
And it was done for you. (Look still on me.)
O beauty of mine, catch me this man's spirit!
—And if it be required of me, I go
As far as sin to keep you. What care I
Who calls it sin? I am here charged by the earth
To bribe you back to her, spend I my holiest.
I dare not disobey her. Why, I am
The earth,—here in my being is the earth
Longing for motherhood as she ever does;
She would be good to you if you would let her.
—O the earth knows of her old enemy!
Not in the frame of things, not where there is

Comfort of light, nor any life but his,
 But alone in his unhappiness he sits
 Ill-favouredly eyeing her, bleak as his place,
 Looking unwholesome charm at whom he can.
 She knows not who he is, but that he turns
 And sours man's blood, making it be a bane
 Within his flesh, and an unkindly temper
 Towards his blessing. O be very ware ;
 The outer wrong has hold upon your soul
 To thief it out of you and away from me.
 It is a malice only : has it made
 Promises to you ? Did it use good words ?
 There is no trust in them. How can a thing
 Never had nature do you any good,—
 You, made of earth, who fetched your life from
 her ?
 But I have better than words for you. Look
 here,
 I'll show you what the earth is.
 You see a girl only ? I say, I am
 The earth's disguise ; she has left to be hills
 And to go in her ways of beautiful strength,
 But hither on this errand for your loved love
 Come out of being Spring, to stand before you
 In me the whole desiring of the goddess,
 And win you to her heart again, my heart.
 Look ! the earth here stands open-armed to you :

Will you not try if the beating and the warmth
Of my life near to yours may not be good ?
But try it ! If here be no happiness,
It were easily left, and no harm done.

Idwal. Aha, who's master now ? Ask me not,
dear,

Why I have been so dull and sluggarded.
Some demon, that was shut within my being,
And long time lay at the bottom of my soul,
Awoke and grappled with me unawares.
Down, by some trick, he pulled me, for he meant
To choke me and escape from out my soul.
All this time he has kept me under, hands
Tight on my throttle, lest I spoke. But now
Your voice surprised him with dismay, and I
Remembered that this soul is mine by right,
Heartened by you ; now am I uppermost
And he is under my tread : 'tis his turn now.
Ah ! 'tis the same as ever it was,—the brow
Like day beginning, frank, the loopt hair winds
Are friendly with. Surely for loving more
Than man you were made, Hazel. It is as if
The moonlight came in a borrowed body once
For lip-love to a man, that you want me.—
As new to me and strange it is as when
First I dared take and hold her hand, brown
As a meadow-pipit's egg, and holding found

The beatings in her wrist close under my palm,
 And marvelled that it was the self-same kind
 Of life I had within my puddled flesh
 That had put on such loveliness as you.
 Now it begins again : it is as good,
 As new and dinning as the first time was.
 Like golden cymbals ringing in mine ears
 It is to look at you. I dare not think
 Too much, you're mine. O I'm alive again.
 Only, I fear to sleep.

Hazel. What fear's in sleep ?

Idwal. I half forget. But while he knelt on me,
 Thrown, stupid, he knew the feud was not yet
 done ;

He was not safe from me, though I was down.
 And one of his bad kin lookt in on him
 When sleep was round us, promising his aid.
 Ah, but I feared that creature. Though he
 brought

No voice or shape to know him by, he was
 About me a dark horror. What his land
 Or folk is, know I not, but he was near
 To naught is in the world.

And he, the fiend who fought me, eagerly lookt
 For the next coming of his goblin friend,
 And surely he would come along with sleep,
 Three nights I have not slept.

Hazel.

O my poor boy !

What, haunted ?—and I thinking of you all
winter

Making the stature of the lifted hills

Felt in that song of yours. And now—O come,

Be in my arms at home again and see

If you'll not sleep there. Come !

*[She persuades him to her breast, and he sleeps
awhile. Then her father, the Parson, returns.]*

Parson. Asleep ? That's good. A sound sleep,
too.

Hazel. Father,

I'm frightened. Half an hour ago he sighed

And turned, shuddering. Put your hand on his
heart ;

I have not dared to.

Parson.

There's no need for that ;

He is not sleeping. Come away, my dear.

—Thank God she's dazed with it. Send she
keep so,

And I may get her home.—Come on, my girl.

I wonder what he died of.

PEREGRINUS

PEREGRINUS

Persons.

Peregrinus Proteus.

Marcon, a Christian.

Chorus of Corinthian youths.

ARGUMENT.

PEREGRINUS, a man notable when the Christian Church was young, having famously lived a wicked life, publicly burnt himself in Greece.

LUCIAN has left one account of the manner of his dying. Another account is here set forth.

BEFORE THE PYRE.

Peregrinus.

Much bruit have I about the world, and fame,
A baying hound, hath never left my sleuth
Nor left to noise the air with feats of mine.
But to be known have I much viciousness

Performed, and gone in lust for many years.
And now I come to burn myself, and this
Shall be the famousest of all my deeds.
I mean to be a flame and a flying smoke,
A wide astonishment to the dim minds
That hamper all the world. But I escape
From that obsequious fame that dogged my life
Yelping, a voice to please ignorant ears.
Now as my flesh shall marry the lit air
In golden burning, news of my bright death
Shall run a fiery gait upon the thoughts
Of upright men, an unaccustomed ardour.

Yet I grieve over my dear desires and lusts
That have to be so cruelly destroyed.
But there's no help ; they are a mutiny,
They grow too strong, and would be masters in me.
I'll not have that. I'll ruin them with the flame
Rather than drive a team I cannot steer.
Moreover, as I burn my living flesh,
I write a message which, if men will read
And follow in the way I link them on,
Will make more joy and beauty in the earth
Than all the hopes of Heaven and fears of God.
When men shall fear their Selves, and after that
Worship their Selves (for worship's the one way
To make a thing sacred and worthy worship)
Men will have come to their full stature then.

Therefore I go into the pains of fire
To shew the world a symbol of such worship:
Nor can I any other way now give
Clean priestly service to my sacred part.
This Marcon too shall preach me to the lands,
I the Nehushtan and the Moses he.
Lo, Marcon comes, and up the ladder I
Reluctant climb: I tread no more on grass,
The earth shall no more be a road for my feet.
But I am climbing higher than this frame
Of timber, higher than any flame shall lunge,
When it is burning me, I climb aloft,
And draw man's thought towering after me.
It is not anguish of the fire comes now,
But the mighty anguish of becoming holy
After long dwelling in the shops of lust.

Air, thou fresh pleasant creature, dear to breathe,
Wilt thou become a fierceness in my lungs?
And thou, dusk evening, shalt soon be torn
With blaze, and reel at the manner of my end.
Here am I at the top. Lonely it seems;—
And I am hung over the risk of death.

Marcon.

A hateful thing is friendship false; yet good
And profitable may it be if God
Bends, as he can, the crooked ill to straight.

I was a friend to Peregrinus,—friend
 In seeming : with the falsehood I serve God.
 This man, to draw the moths o' the world to
 his

Strange lores, here willingly will burn himself,
 A death uncouth, to take the world aghast ;
 And worse than the loose heats and smokes of his
 life

Will be the pestilent reek of his wild death.
 I must prevent him perfecting his death.

Godless and fraudulent he lived : his flesh
 So trampled on his mind, no doubting knew
 Great-lusted Peregrinus, but he sinned
 His life away, not pausing 'twixt his bouts ;
 He was mere ravening of the baser kind,
 Till in these storms unto a vile harbour
 This poor ship drave, into the shelter of hell,
 And rides calm, anchor'd to the devil's heart.

O, I have sicken'd at his blasphemy,
 Applauding it and adding my own wit
 (Which God forgive) to keep him in those ways.
 He holds he hath a better tongue than Christ
 To make men leave the dirt and stand upright ;
 And, lest he found a head to dupe indeed,
 I as disciple swallowed all his teaching,
 His crazy watchwords (how I spew them out)
 Self-serving, self-delight, ay, and self-worship.

And madly he will give himself to stand
In fire until he chars to death, for hopes
Of startling all the unaware dark minds
To manfulness, with a new faith the world
Rumouring farther abroad than Galilee
And Olivet have gone about the mouths
Of nations, and are sacred in men's ears :
And flames perhaps look nobler than a cross.

God gave me cunning ; and I swore to be
The preacher of his notions. He will die
Trusting his words to me. I swore besides
From Corinth to collect with choice a sage
Assembly of staid witnesses. For them
He waits, for them I have swept up
A ribald crowd of youths ; well known to these
By fame is Peregrinus. I have said
That he will burn himself lest he should lose
(For he perceives men's ears grow tired of him)
His infamy, and come to an obscure end :
But openly, in concourse, he will set
The doors of death on fire, and burst a way
By flames through the forbiddance of his flesh,
And win great mention in the talk of feasts.
This—sport it is to them—they come to view
With glee unruly ; yea, behold they come,
Less gentle pack than wolves, announced by wine
Upon the air, laughter and flown gibing,

The snarling happiness of cruel men.
How have men's mouths become so terrible ?

Chorus.

Two here alone ;
Have we been fooled, we are enough
To snatch the jest from these,
And with what merry injuries we please
Bind it on them.
'Tis like we shall be entertained
Whatever case befall.

When God sent down strict duties
To school His men, the kinder Devil sent
Pleasures in a gay troop ;
Tunefully they dance over the heart ;
And of them all the queen is Cruelty,
The subtlest, the least sensuous,
Keener than keen odours,
Fiercer than fierce wine in the brain,
Reaching into the life of us farther than love,
A rapture with no satisfaction in it,
Making the lungs gasp, forgetting to breathe,
And the heart stand still, trembling.

But also it is gravely thought
That pleasures be indeed from God's hands
To be a means of climbing from the earth.

And not amiss that city would be judged
The princeliest, the nearest heaven,
Which had stept up all rungs of lower pleasures,
And had abandoned all the sorts of delight
For this amazement of the nerves,
This sharp delicious ransack of the brain,
This ravishing wild piracy of the soul,
Cruelty.

This need not crawl laborious through a sense,
This hath no masterful appetites
Warily to serve, capricious gate-keepers,—
Now welcoming in pleasure to the mind
As high-birthed lady they are glad to see
Coming to cheer their lord,
Now shutting sulky doors
Before her entrance, calling her ill-names,
Saying they are sick,
Cannot rise to draw the bolts,
Nor would let her tempt
Their lord, the mind, to harlotry.

But Cruelty hath no gates,
Nor qualmish porters in her way :
Though she get help from sense,—
For struggle, eyes,
Ears for cries,
Smelling when we use the fire,—
Yet in the main she is mere intelligence ;

And a dull thing seemeth sense
 And sensual delight,
 To one who has let the exquisite
 Passion of cruelty trouble his heart
 To blithe laughter, and learnt
 Skill in tormenting.

To me in warm love busied, or in cups,
 A whisper came,
 A quiet fame,
 That Peregrinus would all willingly
 Torture his living limbs with fire.
 Then I arose from soft enjoyment,
 From wine and lust and hours of scent,
 To try the thinnest highest element
 Delight can use for being, Cruelty ;
 Hail, Marcon, we are come,
 Hail to thy crazed victim.
 Pay us now our jest, this man's torment.

Mar. Mayhap I yet may use persuasion
 On him. My master, Peregrinus there !

Per. Art eager then ? art thou as ready as I ?

Mar. The worshippers are come : they wait
 the priest.

Per. And soon the priest shall put on holy
 robes.

Mar. Not a soft weaving, such as loves the skin.

Per. But golden, but a glory, the wealth of flame.

Mar. Shall man not love his life, but prefer death ?

Per. He shall love Self better than he loves life.

Mar. And yet thou say'st, death utterly scatters Self.

Per. Nothing it matters if that be or not.

Mar. How pleasant in the beating heart is life.

Per. But if a man hath left to rule his lusts,
Which are to teach him wonder only,—fed
And pamper'd them unwisely, till he knows
Beasts of desire are in him, bloated things,
And his imagination is no more
Than a byre full of moaning appetites,
And danger is that they may break out wild,
Root up and dung the orchard of his soul
And in foul mischief plough it and stamp to mud,
And the lord Self be under maniac hoofs,—
Then better than such outrage is to die.

Mar. What gain to Self is that, if Self is murder'd ?

Per. The gain of standing upright to the end.

Mar. Fixed, then, thou art to burn life out of thee ?

Per. Yes, and to be the king of all my being.

Mar. O, but it is a dreadful way to death.

Per. The worse the pain, the kinglier am I.
 Hast thou forgot, moreover, that this act
 Is as an angel standing upon earth
 Amid a burning secrecy of wings,
 Summoning hearts to heed news out of Heaven?—
 “Take care that no harm come, Man, to thy Self,
 And death is better than to be defiled.”
 I am to announce the holiness of Self;
 I am the trumpet, but thou art the herald.

Mar. Stop, I will sit no more beside thy
 danger ;
 Burn thyself as thou wilt, but now at last
 Know I detest, spit out, and fear thy doctrine,
 As God does thee. Thou art the Devil’s friend :
 Burn now and to eternity. I am
 A Christian.

Per. A slave. O lying tongue
 I half suspected this. Love thou thy malice,
 I am not harmed. This serious company
 Shall now proclaim my ending to the world.

Chorus. He comes to speak. Look well for
 fear in him,
 For that’s the seasoning in a man’s torment.

Per. O men, desire no great farewell of me.
 I have strapt indeed a harness against fear
 Upon me, but he shoots many arrows.
 And there’s no breast given as target to him

His sharp archery may not wound at length,
However forged about with the mind's brass.
Yet must I tell you why I burn myself.

Behold, the world and all the beings in it
A multitude of waves upon a sea.
But as a chance of flows and currents often
Sieves the watery substance into whirl,
And in the sea doth separately exist
That whirl, so is the kind of man in the world.
Or scatter a pool of quicksilver and see
How easily the drops are one again ;
But if one drop have rolled among some dirt,
The skin it now hath keeps it out of the rest.
So is man's nature floating in the world,
Having acquired a dirt of strange desires
To keep him still unmixt with the one substance.
Take not too closely, though, that "dirt" : I
mean

Only to nail upon your memories
This ruling word : how utterly apart
Man, by the Self he hath, is from the world.

Chorus. What, is he teaching? Come, let's
have some tales

Among ourselves.—It seems a well-built pyre.

Per. So then there is a new creature in the old
Draught of eternal flowing substance down
The spacious alley of the will of God,—

Gathered perplexity of substance, called
 The Self of Man : and let it be a boat
 Steered by strong wilful oars about the tide.

It is well said, Be good and love mankind ;
 But it is better said, Be beautiful
 And love yourselves : for this contains the other.
 How can you love what is not beautiful ?
 I would have each man passionately in love
 With his own Self : see that it take no harm,
 And let not the base breathing of the world,
 The nuzzling friendship of such mouths as munch
 Garbage, come tarnishing your silver thought.
 The one sure thing in all the world is Self ;
 See that it be a Self worthy the having,
 And namely one that is never satisfied
 With its own excellence. I know a way
 The kind of Man may be a holy kind,
 And dress itself in beauty as the sun
 Wears naturally, excellent in the heavens,
 For self-delight his golden gear of virtue.

For none who love and honour their own selves
 Would do the frauds, malices, sneakings, lies,
 The huffing impudence and bragg'd lechery,
 That cause the life of man to smear a scum
 Over the world as if a sewer had burst.
 But cease to stand about the swampy earth
 And grieve to find the mud holding your ankles

When you would seek, following a light-foot
dream,

The good firm land that has not been in storms
Of evil rain, nor been drowned nastily.

Follow no dreams ; try not to mend the world,
But mend yourselves. Ye love unthriftilly
God and your neighbour ; call in your rambling
love,

Ye need it all yourselves to shore your wills
From resting on the soft uncleanly sin.

When you have thus grown strong (and you
shall find

Mercy the prop to make a soul most strong),

Then you shall join me in this mystery,

Self-worship, and not die (as I must do)

To enter it. For worship can make holy,

And man shall be a sacred thing at last

When difficultly he learns to be the priest

Of his own Self, lighting clean fires of worship

With every faculty of flesh and soul.

And henceforth in the world shall walk a ghost

With the appearance of blown fire, to haunt

The ease of men, and amaze them out of comfort.

For here I lift up to the world a token,

A burning type of high self-love, the world's

Instance of the self-worship's ritual.

I have sinned the unforgivable sin against

Myself, rendering body and mind unfit
 To be inhabited by a sacred thing,
 And profit ye thereby. For greatest wrong
 Compels this greatest act of worship from me.
 I made of my desires not ecstasy
 But lust ; as rooms of mere delight
 I lived in passions, not seeing that they were
 Porches only into wonder, and made
 To be past through, but not inhabited.
 And like a deadly climate they have grieved
 And spoilt my nature, crept into my marrow,
 And made intolerable wrong in my soul.
 But I will not have myself so dismayed
 Or with wild infamous handling hurt and pusht
 From being throned. I come to burn myself.
 And as I stand naked before the hot
 Mouth of the hungry fire, and am devoured,—
 As by its dreadful love I am enjoyed,
 And have no being except pain until
 Perfectly I become the mate of flame,
 Then know that I with golden voice announce
 And sound over the world from midst my bright
 Rapture out of dishonourable life,
 That henceforth in the hearts of men shall be
 Their own worship : Self is the sacred thing.
 Now let thy torches be prepared, Marcon.

Chorus. Oft have I wisht

I had beheld the famous sport
The King of Egypt gave unto his court,
When she, the fairest of his wives,
Thinking she was not husbanded enough,
In action went the same way as her thought.
Her the king gave choice,—on swords to die
Or else to have her face publicly
Tortured into hideousness.
And joy ran down the anxious streets
When the king let cry amid blown horns
His mercy, that her beauty should be murder'd,
But she might keep her life.
They say the thing went happily :
It might have been a panther
Beneath the struggled men,
So spat and yelled the lady,
Bit and scratched, butted and kickt,
Tore at the irons and shook hands with burning
To save a little of her look ;
After, when the heat-loosen'd flesh set firm,
Her lips were ludicrously writhed.
But this thing promises a greater joke
Than that Egyptian quip.
And after this I think I shall not wish so much
That I had seen her face,
Her undelighted grin,
When first they trapt her visage in a gin

Of white-hot wires and were ingenious
 To screw with branding her neck-sinews
 Into a rigid wrying tackle,
 And the smoke of her own flesh was tangled in
 her hair.

Per. Friends, friends, good friends, it was a
 jest.

Chorus. Now it begins ; now mark him well,
 dear souls.

Per. What fool hath taken the ladder ? Bring
 it back.

Chorus. You see, 'tis as the wise heads say. A
 beast

But gives, howe'er elaborately killed,
 A single pleasure. But a man gives twain,—
 Both killing and ridiculous fear of death.

Per. The ladder, Marcon ; dear Marcon, bring
 me the ladder.

What art thou doing with that torch, thou fool ?
 Keep off, take care of all those flying sparks,
 Stamp it into the sand ;—no, no, good Marcon,
 Bring it not near the faggots, see how it spits
 Hot resin. Hold it away, curst fool, away.—
 You there, Corinthians, hold that murderous
 man ;

Bind him, throttle him, friends, and let me down.

Chorus. This is the best : on us he calls to save.

Per. Have ye not had enow of jest ? and more
Will come ; hereafter I will make myself
Your banquets' laughing stock, the clown of
feasts,

But only let me down.—I will not die.

Chorus. Thou wilt not die ! Fool, dost thou
think we have left.

Our night's pursuits, and will not see thee die ?
Marcon, light thou the pyre, or we will hurl
Thee into it, and burn the pair of you.

Per. Ah,—now I see what bloody men ye are ;
And I must die mockt at by such a herd,
And they will make a jest of me over the world,
No honourable report. Marcon, too,
Forswears his part ; into what strange darkness
Has been betrayed the shining of my death ?—
That would have been a medicine for all minds
Enfeebled with the bane of help from Heaven
And roused them from the pallets of sick ease
Which self-mistrust, that priestly surgery,
Drove them to lie on ; but not now, not now
I burn myself, like hyssop, for the world.
What then ? Why, it is as it should be now.
For now privately I shall do my worship
And have my own approval, no stared applause,
Far better rite. To my own holiness,
To my Self, is all my being sacrificed :

I am the Champion against my own wrong.
 Marcon, my heart is braced ; yare with thy fires.

Chorus. Little flames, merry flames, modest low
 chucklings,

This is but maidenly pretence of shyness ;
 Little flames, happy flames, what are these secrets
 You so modestly whisper one another ?

Do we not know your golden desires,
 And the brave way you tower into lust
 Mightily shameless ?

Why do you inly skulk among the timber ?
 Stand up, yellow flames, take the joy given you ;
 Resins and spunkwood, faggots and turpentine,
 A deal of spices, a great cost of benzoin,
 Everything proper for your riot, O flames.

Leap up the bavins,
 Run up these joys we have built like a stair for you ;
 Fuel lies topmost waiting your frenzy
 Better than sap, better than tar,
 For you to kindle.

'Tis flesh and blood, life and feeling,
 Desperate moisture besieged by your heat,
 Silly resistance to your golden desires,
 Agony wrestling with pitiless glee,
 Mad Peregrinus ;
 Rarely delightful to you, I guess.
 —Ha, didst hear ?

A cry, like a frightened bird, flew out,
But sudden it stopt, as a hunter
Shot the wild flight.

Flames, flames, rejoice, ye have found him !
Up with you now, stroke him first and singe him
gently,

Call out some vagaries from him,
And then take hold of the man
And tie his soul up in torment.

Ah, but I wish I could be as flames are ;
No more deal in such peddlings of desire
As senses cheaply buy,
But quite become desire
As you do, flames.

Mar. Now I have done good service to the
Lord

With my false friendship ; for the man is gone
And his hugg'd wickedness along with him
To be unseen, and no more to God's eyes
Hateful, smother'd beyond all offending
In violent places full of the old worm.

O flame, O nature prosperous for the Lord,
O captain over the angers of just Heaven,
Have now thy hottest, holiest zeal, and turn
The mercy of the air to indignation.

Slacken not thou from whiteness, be not red
Nor even gold, but white and terribly white,

The utter purity thou hadst from God
 When he began to war. Be fiercely good,
 Till thou hast lickt this evil up, and made him
 Flakes of fire in the night. But thou, O Lord,
 Let me be pleasant and delightful to thee ;
 Forget not me, if I have served thee here.
 And thou, blue-kirtled Mary, who on earth
 Didst nourish God, an infancy of flesh
 Taking the simple milk of thy dear breast
 Instead of spiritual thrones adoring ;
 When he, thy Son, down to his promist judgment
 Rides out of Heaven upon Eternity
 Harnesst under his hands, and with one stroke
 Of wielded holiness on this clotted nature
 Breaks up mortality and turns to ghost
 The whole fixt starry creature of the world,
 An universal Easter of all being,
 Mary, look that I come into the light.

Chorus. Did the much-wander'd Peregrinus—
 Or the much-lying ('tis the same)—
 Say ever he had seen the Phœnix burning ?
 Into those brave tales of his,—
 The hairy giants who desired him for meat,
 The Northern dragons that he slew,
 And showed the tooth of one,
 (But that, I have heard, came from an alligarth's
 jaws :

He found it dead and rotting once,
And fought with nothing fiercer than a stink,)—
Into those excellent impudences
Surely the Phœnix came,
Shrieking as the flames tired upon her,
And all the Arabian air
Full of the messages of burning myrrh ?
For methinks he would be making now
An image of such vision.

But when these ashes whiten,
Will a famous ghost spring out,
Spurning the glow-hearted logs
Till into sparks they lighten,
A more perpetual life ?
Ay, in immortal laughter,
Like a beetle overcome in amber,
We will catch his ghost.
See, thou crazy ghost,
Lovingly we have limed thee
In imperishable gum of merriment,
Tomb thou never shalt escape.
At many a feast, when chaplets are awry
And tipsy spilth is wasting half the wine
And all the lanterns sway,
Thou shalt be handed round and praised
More than Atlantic pearl or topaz out of
Meroe,

Thou precious ghost, safe from time
In a clear sepulchre of laughter.

Ah ! Ah !

How greatly flared the pyre,
With what a roar its framework fell,
The scaffolding all loosed with fire.
Did see, my friends, that neck of flame
Leap from these ended agonies ?
There is a crimson dazzle in my eyes ;
Was there not a mighty swag of smoke
Like, most like, a big unnatural bat ?
It was over us, with sparking eyes,
And large hollow wings outspread ;
Did they not flap heavily
Like wings of a demon huge vampire
Bloated with sleepy blood ?
Did it not hiss and scream ?—
Or was it moisture of a pine made steam
And forcing through the wood ?,
'Tis likely, for as I lookt again
Nothing was there to abash the stars,
And all quite vain
Of smoke the golden flames did spire.

Well, we will take thy lesson,
As near as we can get to it.
The world is a muddy place,
Mankind is an unpleasant race ;

What shall we do with our time here ?
There is no good answer at all,
Save this, the thing of most delight,
For which all, except fools, must fight,
Is to be known and pointed out in the street.
Fame must be bought at any price,—
Folly, ignomy, or vice,
It matters not, so fame is bought.
And better it is to die as thou hast done
Than to live unknown.

Mar. O stop this foolish noise, your murderers,
For such you are who swarmed to this affair
Merely to see him die, and would not help him.

Chorus. Look at this angry man. Who was it
told

The city of this jest ? And didst thou help ?

Mar. I let him die because—you will not take
me—

His thoughts burnt like wicked sulphur, and spoilt
God's pleasure in the fragrant prayers of saints.

Chorus. And how did his burning flesh smell to
thy god ?

Agreeably to his nose ?

Mar. Peace, insolent mouth.

Chorus. But why should Peregrinus burn him-
self ?

Mar. Because he thought to loose over the
earth

Widely a running blasphemy, and dip
Men's thoughts in his, as in a vat of brimstone.

Chorus. But this is wild talk. Did he not die
for fame?

Mar. Not as you think. But, friends, I would
not have

This thing much known; tell it not commonly.

Semi-chorus. The world shall hear, the world
shall laugh,

And he who paints with nimblest fancy

What on the top was hid,

How flame and smoke leapt down his throat and
tore

His inwards with convulsing storm,

The hideous end of his vain life,

He shall most jocular hearers find,

Raise the merriest laughter.

And if this Marcon spread abroad

Any of this notion,

That Peregrinus had some other purpose

Than a mere craze for infamy

So dying in this manner,

He shall be laught to scorn and for a fool

Pointed at by mockers.

Chorus. In olden time they held it was the gods

Plagued to madness such as he
Who sought with shouted fame
To make the world his temple ;
And, though now we have no gods,
Strangeness visits still brains of men,
As shooting-stars furrow clear skies
Into unusual lights.
But what care whence it comes ?
For being here, good it is for laughter.
It is unwise to question,
But it is very wise to laugh ;
Behold, gone is Peregrinus,
Of his mad death only a smoulder left.
Now never was there in the world a game
So merry as this ravishing
Death of Peregrinus.

POEMS

POEMS

SOUL AND BODY

Body.

ART thou for breaking faith, after these years,
These many married years
Wherein we have ourselves so well delighted ?

Why art thou sick ? Art thou beginning fears
That our dear joys have been unholy things ?
Trust me, since we have been so long plighted,—
Whate'er be this white worship thou dost mean
To reach on these unlucky wings,—
Thou wilt miss the wonder I have made for thee
Of this dear world with my fashioning senses,
The blue, the fragrance, the singing, and the
green.

And thou wilt find, not having me,
Crippled thy high powers, gone to doubt
Thy indignation and thy love, without
Help of my lust, and the anger of my blood,

And my tears.

Try me again ; dost thou remember how we stood
And lookt upon the world exultingly ?

What is for rapture better than these ?—

Great places of grassy land, and all the air

One quiet, the sun taking golden ease

Upon an afternoon ;

Tall hills that stand in weather-blinded trances

As if they heard, drawn upward and held there,

Some god's eternal tune ;

I made them so, I with my fashioning senses

Made the devoted hills : have their great patiences

Not lent thee any health of ecstasy ?

Or when the north came shouting to the beach,

Wind that would gag in his throat a lion's speech,

And spindrift with a whining hiss went by

Like swords,—wert thou not glad with me ?

O who will lodge thee better than I have done

In exultation ?—I who alone

Can wash thee in the sacring of moonlight,

Or send thee soaring even that above

Into the wise and unimaginable night,

The chambers of the holy fear,

Or bring thee to the breasts of love.

Soul.

Dear Body, my loved friend, poor thanks have I

For all this service. As if fires had made me
clean,

I come out of thy experience,

Thy blue, thy fragrance, thy singing, and thy
green,

Passions of love, and most, that holy fear :

Well hast thou done to me with every sense.

But there's for me a fiercer kind

Of joy, that feels not, knows not, deaf and blind :

And these but led to it, that we did try

When we were person, thou and I ;

Woe for me if I should dare

Partake in person now I see

The lights of unware ecstasy.

I must not in amazement stay,

Henceforth I am for a way

Beyond thy senses, beauty and fear,

Beyond wonder even.

I want neither earth nor heaven,

I will not have ken or desire,

But only joy higher and higher

Burning knowledge in its white fire

Till I am no more aware

And no more saying " I am I,"

But all is perfect ecstasy.

THE TRANCE

LORD GOD, I saw thee then ; one mind
last night,
Met thee upon thy ways.

I was upon a hill, alone ;
My drudgèd sense was aching in amaze :
Into my thought had too much gone
The inconceivable room of the blue night,—
The blue that seems so near to be
Appearance of divinity,—
And the continual stars.
I was afraid at so much permanence,
And was in trouble with vastness and fixt law.
All round about I saw
The law's unalterable fence,
And like a forgery of shining bars
The stresses of the suns were there,
Keeping, in vastness prisoner,
My thought caged from infinity.
And then, suddenly,—

While perhaps twice my heart was dutiful
To send my blood upon its little race,—
I was exalted above surety
And out of time did fall.
As from a slander that did long distress,
A sudden justice vindicated me
From the customary wrong of Great and Small.
I stood outside the burning rims of place,
Outside that corner, consciousness.
Then was I not in the midst of thee
Lord God ?

A momentary gust
Of power, a swift dismay
Putting the infinite quiet to disarray,
A thing like anger or outbreking lust,
A zeal immeasurably sent,—
So Law came and went,
And smote into a bright astonishment
Of stars the season of eternity,
And grazed the darkness into glowing lanes.
Swiftly that errand of God's vehemence,
The passion which was Law, slid by,
Carrying surge of creatures, fiery manes
Of matter and the worldly foam
And riddles of transgressing flame ;
So the Law's kindled shakings came
A moment, and went utterly.

And seemed to be no more
Than if through the eternal corridor
Of emptiness a sob did roam,
Or a cry out of a fearful ecstasy.

CEREMONIAL ODE
INTENDED FOR A UNIVERSITY

I.

WHEN from Eternity were separate
The curdled element
And gathered forces, and the world
began,—
The Spirit that was shut and darkly blent
Within this being, did the whole distress
With a blind hanker after spaciousness.
Into its wrestle, strictly tied up in Fate
And closely natured, came like an open'd grate
At last the Mind of Man,
Letting the sky in, and a faculty
To light the cell with lost Eternity.

II.

So commerce with the Infinite was regained :
For upward grew Man's ken
And trode with founded footsteps the grievous fen
Where other life festering and prone remained.

With knowledge painfully quarried and hewn fair,
 Platforms of lore, and many a hanging stair
 Of strong imagination Man has raised
 His Wisdom like the watch-towers of a town ;
 That he, though fastened down
 In law, be with its cruelty not amazed,
 But be of outer vastness greatly aware.

III.

This, then, is yours : to build exultingly
 High, and yet more high,
 The knowledgeable towers above base wars
 And sinful surges reaching up to lay
 Dishonouring hands upon your work, and drag
 From their uprightness your desires to lag
 Among low places with a common gait.
 That so Man's mind, not conquered by his clay,
 May sit above his fate,
 Inhabiting the purpose of the stars,
 And trade with his Eternity.

“ALL LAST NIGHT . . .”

ALL last night I had quiet
In a fragrant dream and warm :
She had become my Sabbath,
And round my neck, her arm.

I knew the warmth in my dreaming ;
The fragrance, I suppose,
Was her hair about me,
Or else she wore a rose.

Her hair, I think ; for likest
Woodruffe 'twas, when Spring
Loitering down wet woodways
Treads it sauntering.

No light, nor any speaking ;
Fragrant only and warm.
Enough to know my lodging,
The white Sabbath of her arm.

DECEMBER 31ST

WHAT is he hammering there,
That devil swinking in Hell?
O, he forges a cunning New Year,
God knows he does it well.

Mill and harrow and rake,
A restless enginery
Of men and women to make
Cruelty, Harlotry.

HOPE AND DESPAIR

S AID God, "You sisters, ere ye go
Down among men, my work to do,
I will on each a badge bestow :
Hope I love best, and gold for her,
Yet a silver glory for Despair,
For she is my angel too."

Then like a queen, Despair
Put on the stars to wear.
But Hope took ears of corn, and round
Her temples in a wreath them bound.—
Which think ye lookt the more fair ?

ROSES CAN WOUND

R OSES can wound,
But not from having thorns they do
most harm ;
Often the night gives, starry-sheen or moon'd,
Deep in the soul alarm.
And it hath been within my heart like fear,
Girl, when you were near.

The mist of sense,
Wherein the soul goes shielded, can divide,
And she must cringe and be ashamed, and wince,
Nor in appearance hide
Of rose or girl from the blazing mastery
Of bared Eternity.

A FEAR

AS over muddy shores a dragon flock
Went, in an early age from ours discrete
Before the grim race found oblivion meet;
And as Time harden'd into iron rock
That unclean mud, and into cliffs did lock
The story of that terrifying street,
The hookèd claws and scale of wrinkled feet,
Till quarrying startles us with amaz'd shock.

So there was Somewhat wont to pass along
The plashy marge of my rathe consciousness.
Now the quagmires are turned to pavements
strong ;
Those outer twilight regions bold I may
Explore,—yet still I shudder with distress
At hideous fixèd slots of his old way.

INDIGNATION

AN ODE

I.

THERE was an anger among men
In the old days ; and it was as a sword
In the hands of the Spirit then
To hew the ambusht villainy out of his path
And in its thievish lurking kill the fraud.
And all the greeds of hell kept to their den
When the Spirit in his hands took wrath.
But lately, when there smiting should have been,
Who has a weapon seen ?
The Spirit stands and looks on infamy,
And unashamed the faces of the pit
Snarl at their enemy
Finding him wield no insupportable light
And no whirled edge of blaze to hit
Backward their impudence, and hammer them to
flight ;
Although ready is he,

Wearing the same righteous steel
Upon his limbs, helmed as he was then
When he made olden war ;
Yet cannot now with foulness fiercely deal.
There is no indignation among men,
The Spirit has no scimeter.

II.

Wilt thou not come again, thou godly sword,
Into the Spirit's hands ?
That he may be a captain of the Lord
Again, and mow out of our lands
The crop of wicked men.
O thou forged anger, sword
Made of the holy rage
That went out against the old sick fen
Of being and on disorder warr'd
And fought it into fire and white stars
When God made Heavens out of the unwhole-
some age
And maladies of existence, into good
Hunting all that liked not to be glad,—
In what armoury art thou now uplaid,
And is the rust upon thy blade ?
These many years unhelped has stood
The Spirit, weaponless against bad,
Having no sharpness and no heat

Of indignation wherewith to meet
 And battle with the vile banners, his great
 Beleaguerment of fiends. But to his hands
 Come thou and clear our lands.
 Let him exult to feel the weight
 Of wrath swinging with his arm abroad,
 And the air about him burn'd with a sword.
 Let there be fire, and the anger of the Lord.

III.

The Mind of Man has been a sacred place,
 And into it the evil race
 Would trespass warily, much afraid
 Of sorely-felt assaults upon them made
 By statures of great wind that came
 Terribly using a huge flame
 Intolerably white.
 But now that wrath comes never out to fight,
 The fiendish bands go lording in the day
 And openly possess the mind of man.
 With meaningless scurries of their insane feet
 They have rutted the helpless ground
 Like baggage-travell'd clay.
 And when the climate of man's thought they
 found
 Blue air, a road for immortal lights,—
 Days like the house of God, and hosted nights

Held by the champions of eternity,—
With evil fires the swarms began
To make a weather they could understand
Of yellow dusk and smoky enormous bale
To grieve over the land
And make the sunlight fail.
Till a low roof of dirty storm they brought
To hang upon the mind of man :
Who cannot see that man's huge thought
Is now a dark calamity ?

IV.

But how long shall the Spirit see
The Life of Man, wherein with such delight
He walkt his glebe, and in his ways would sing
To do his pleasant gardening,
How long see his own especial ground
Vext in a season of disastrous blight,
Trampled and staled and trodden filthily
By troops of insolence, the beasts of hell ?
But the Spirit now is built up narrowly,
And kept within a shameful pound,
Walled in with folly and stupid greed
Lest he should come to plead
Against our ugly wickedness,
Against our wanton dealing of distress,
The forced defilement of humanity,

The foundries and the furnaces
 That straddle over the human place.
 Nothing comes to rebuke us for
 The hearts we wound with laws grievously,
 The souls our commerce clutches
 Cunningly into inescapable lime,
 Embruted in wicked streets, made debase
 In villainous alleys and foul hutches,
 There trapt in vice and crime,
 And for the wrong we did, who made them poor,
 Set to pay infamous penalties in gaols ;
 Not even for this the Spirit breaks his pales.
 And shall there be no end to life's expense
 In mills and yards and factories,
 With no more recompense
 Than sleep in warrens and low styes,
 And undelighted food ?
 Shall still our ravenous and unhandsome mood
 Make men poor and keep them poor ?—
 Either to starve or work in deadly shops
 Where the damn'd wisdom of the wheels
 Fearfully fascinates men's wit and steals,
 With privy embezzlement that never stops,
 The worker's conscience into their spinning roar,—
 Until men are the dead stuff there,
 And the engines are aware ?
 Shall we not think of Beauty any more

In our activities ?
Or do no better than to God complain ?—
I would that to the world would come again
That indignation, that anger of the Lord,
Which once was known among us men.
For terrible and upright then
The Spirit would stand suddenly out of his ways
Of crouching grief and tears,
As by a hilt handling the wrathful blaze,
Having again a sword.
And he would ruin all the mischievous walls
That had been raised up of materials
Darkly quarried in hell, to hedge
And fence him out of the life of man ;
But he with anger's shining edge
Would mightily cut the built iniquities,
Commerce, and all the policies
Of ownership and avarice ;
And they would buckle at his stroke
Perishing into flights of smoke.
Then he with a dreadful song, a sound
To put a howling fear in the bad horde,
Would step again on his own ground,
He and his indignant sword,
And the golden havoc would begin.
Those foul 'ghosts encampt in man
Would run from the stabbing light of his blade.

Caught in the anger's burning wheel,
The huge scything of the tempered zeal,
This clumsy unlit shed we have made,
Money, to house our being in,
Would travel like a wind-blown thing.
In that fanning as motes would be,
The sword-thresht fabric of our trade,
Our happy greed, our healthy wring,
Our villainous prosperity.
And ript out of its cursèd rind
Of laidly duties, that did wring
And clamp in ignominy man's whole mind,
This iron scurf of labour torn away,
Thought would walk again like a sacred king
The shining space of immortality.

O for that anger in the hands
Of Spirit ! To us, O righteous sword,
Come thou and clear our lands,
O fire, O indignation of the Lord !

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L. A.



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